
Geology in Glasgow museums

G.P.Durant (after W.D. Ian Rolfe)

Large collections of geological specimens, featuring much local material, are housed in both the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow University (open to the public 9.30–5 pm. Monday to Friday, 9.30–1 pm. Saturday and Sunday) and the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove (open to the public 10–5 pm. Monday to Saturday, late-night opening to 9 pm. on Thursdays, 12 noon–6pm. Sunday). Each museum contains exhibits of general geological interest, as well as locally relevant displays and both mount temporary exhibitions which often feature geological subjects. They employ geological curators who can help visitors with specimen identification and geological information.

Only a small part of the collections is on exhibit at any one time, but access to the catalogues and large reserve collections in store can be organised by prior arrangement with the curators. Both museums are always anxious to see and record new geological finds in the region, even if the finder does not wish to present the specimens to either museum.

The Hunterian Museum collections are particularly rich in local Palaeozoic fossils especially from the Ordovician of the Girvan district (collected by J. Begg, A. Lamont, R.P. Tripp and J.K. Ingham) and the recently discovered Carboniferous fish and arthropods from Bearsden, including the Bearsden Shark (collected by S.P. Wood), fresh water mussels of the Coal Measures (collected by A.E. Trueman, J. Weir and their students) and Quaternary shells of the Clyde basin (H.W. Crosskey collection). It also houses the Kidston collection of thin-sections of fossil plants, including the famous Old Red Sandstone flora of the Rhynie Chert. Many thousands of the fossils are especially important in being 'type-specimens', the ultimate name bearers and reference standards for comparison of one fossil with another.

The Hunterian Museum also possesses suites of major local rock types (a collection largely built up by G.W. Tyrrell) and large collections of rocks from around the world (including many specimens collected by J.W. Gregory). The petrological reference collection also includes many thousands of microscope thin-sections, which can be made available to bone fide research workers. The museum has important mineral collections including many connoisseur pieces from classic European localities assembled by William Hunter, the founder of the museum, as well as the Brown of Lanfine, Eck, Rutley and Clarke collections. There are excellent collections of zeolites from the local Carboniferous lavas, minerals from the Leadhills mining district and gemstones from a variety of sources. The meteorite collection includes the High Possil meteorite which landed in Glasgow in 1804. Several historically important geological collections include that of D. Ure, Lord Seymour and Playfair's collection of rocks from Glen Tilt illustrating Hutton's theories and Sir G. S. Mackenzie's 1810 Iceland collection. The museum has recently been designated as the Scottish Universities' Earth Sciences collections centre and regularly receives research collections from research students and academic staff.

Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum has fine collections of fossils from the West of Scotland including the John Young collection of local Carboniferous fossils, the Slimon collection of Silurian arthropods from Lesmahagow, the Dairon collection of graptolites from the Southern Uplands and the Lord Archibald 'Campbell collection of Tertiary plants from Ardtun, Mull, first described by Campbell's father the 8th Duke of Argyll. The relatively small mineral and rock collection includes the important D.C. Glen and J. Fleming collections. A collection of fossils was purchased by the Museum in 1899 from the Geological Society of Glasgow.