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The Palaeontology Newsletter

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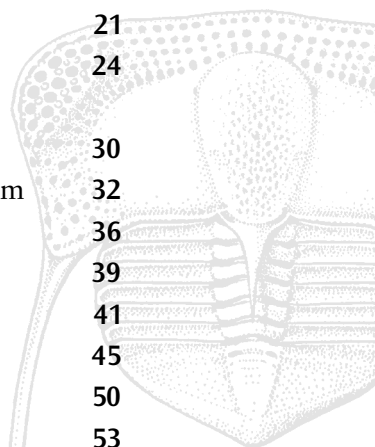
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—OBITUARY—

Euan N. K. Clarkson **1937 – 2024**

Palaeontology has lost one of its most well-known figures of the past half century. Euan Clarkson's international reputation transcended the excellence of his diverse palaeontological research and his acclaimed textbook; his infectious enthusiasm and genuine interest provided tremendous encouragement to undergraduates, postgraduates, professional and amateur palaeontologists alike.

Euan's contributions to the Palaeontological Association included his organization of the Annual Meeting (twice) and four stints on Council (spanning four decades), including his role as President (1998–2000). He was awarded the Association's Lapworth Medal in 2012, and also the Clough Medal of the Edinburgh Geological Society (1993), the Keith Medal of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1997), the T. Neville George Medal of the Geological Society of Glasgow (1999) and the Coke Medal of The Geological Society (2010).

Euan was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Following National Service, he studied Botany, Zoology and Geology at the University of Cambridge, where he obtained his BA (1960) and PhD (1964). He was appointed Assistant Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh in 1963 and remained there for his entire career, rising through the hierarchy to become Professor in 1998 and Professor Emeritus on his retirement in 2002. He was awarded a DSc at Edinburgh in 1983 and elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh the following year.

Euan played an active part in his science as Council member, editor and conference organizer for several societies, as a trustee of the Natural History Museum, London (1987–1992), as a very popular invited speaker and field excursion leader, and as a widely used external examiner for undergraduate and higher degrees. Many people owe their appointments after graduating or the subsequent advancement in their careers to his eloquent, enthusiastic and supportive testimonials. He was an excellent teacher who stimulated both Earth Science and final year Zoology students to undertake palaeobiological PhDs. His stated belief was that “you have to put your students first, and research is what you do in your spare time”. And how productive that ‘spare time’ was.



Euan Clarkson in Lund in 2008. Photo by Per Ahlberg.



Euan's PhD research on the functional morphology of trilobites, especially their visual system, was a theme he followed throughout his career. The scope of his work on trilobite eyes with their calcite lenses expanded as the technology developed from the optical microscope, through the SEM, to CT scanning. Likewise, his collaborations on trilobite eyes became increasingly broad, involving, to name but a few: early work on eye reduction with Raimund Feist, the famous study in 1975 with the physicist Ricardo Levi-Setti linking the structure of schizochroal eyes to the optics of Descartes and Huygens; and the more recent, highly productive work with the biophysicist Brigitte Schoenemann and others, also including the visual systems of other fossil invertebrates.

In collaboration with many workers from Europe, South America and China, Euan published systematic works on trilobite faunas from the Cambrian to the Carboniferous, studies on the structure and function of the exoskeleton, and descriptions of ontogenies. Euan's gift for foreign languages often facilitated such collaborations. His ontogenetic studies included work with Zhang Xi-Guang, Franco Tortello and researchers in Sweden. In the early 1990s, Euan became interested in olenid trilobites from the Cambrian Alum Shales of Scandinavia. Following his three-month sabbatical at Lund University in 1993, he became a frequent guest at the Department of Geology there, doing extensive field work and studying the ontogenetic stages and evolution of successive olenid species. This research project was largely carried out in collaboration with Per Ahlberg, Kristina Månsson, John Ahlgren and Cecilia Taylor. During his visits to Lund, Euan was an inspiration and mentor for numerous PhD students and younger researchers and he considered Lund University his 'second academic home'.

Euan's arthropod work was not limited to trilobites. Crustaceans formed a major focus of a highly productive investigation with Derek Briggs of exceptionally preserved faunas in the Carboniferous of Scotland and northern England (1980–1990). The work also resulted in the discovery of the first known conodont animal, described with Dick Aldridge; descriptions of subsequently found specimens also involved Paul Smith. Much more recently, Euan worked with Polish colleagues on the geochemistry and enigmatic fossils of the Scottish deposits containing the exceptional faunas.

Regional-scale studies involved extensive fieldwork on Ordovician macro- and microfossils in Southern Scotland with Alan Owen, David Harper, Howard Armstrong, Colin Scrutton, Cecilia Taylor, Taniel Danelian, Yves Candela and Thijs Vandenbroucke. Euan's extensive work on the Silurian rocks of the Pentland Hills combined his love of hill walking and nature with geology and palaeontology. Many of the results of this career-long passion involved collaboration with specialists in a wide range of taxonomic groups and were summarized in the Association's beautifully-illustrated, 2007, *Field Guide to the Silurian Fossils of the Pentland Hills, Scotland*, edited by Euan with David Harper, Cecilia Taylor and Lyall Anderson. Euan, in his own engaging style, documented his personal journey in the article 'Pentlands Odyssey' in the *Scottish Journal of Geology* in 2000.

Euan also spent nearly three years writing *Invertebrate Palaeontology and Evolution*; this work evolved through four editions between 1979 and 1998 and was the standard palaeontological textbook in many parts of the world. Its clear, lucid style and highly informative illustrations (most drawn by Euan, a talented artist) made it the 'go-to' volume for students and academics alike. The textbook and Pentlands fossil guide are among about 180 publications produced by Euan between 1966 and 2023. These also include two books on Scottish geology written with his Edinburgh colleague Brian Upton, four co-edited conference volumes and two co-edited geological field excursion guides.



In 1962 Euan married another Cambridge graduate, Cynthia Cowie, who survives him along with their four sons, John, Peter, Tom and Matt, and six grandchildren. Their loss as a family is immense. Euan was genuinely interested in almost everyone he met, palaeontologist or otherwise. His legacy will thrive, not only through his exceptional scientific achievements, but in the many lives he inspired and enriched. Our science has lost a true giant and a much-valued colleague.

Alan W. Owen

University of Glasgow, UK

David A. T. Harper

Durham University, UK

Per Ahlberg

Lund University, Sweden

Peter R. Sheldon

The Open University, UK



Euan Clarkson in the field in his beloved Pentland Hills, Scotland, in 1993. Photo by Per Ahlberg.

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CLARKSON, E. N. K. 1998. *Invertebrate Palaeontology and Evolution*, fourth edition. Blackwell Science, Oxford. 470 pp.

CLARKSON, E. N. K., HARPER, D. A. T., TAYLOR, C. M. and ANDERSON, L. I. (eds). 2007. *Silurian Fossils of the Pentland Hills, Scotland*. The Palaeontological Association. 218 pp.

[Editor's note: you can read more about Euan's career in his own words on this webpage:

<<https://www.palass.org/careers/series-careering-course/careering-course-euan-clarkson-academic-professor>>, and his reminisces on the Association here: <<https://www.palass.org/association/palass-60>>.]