



5th March 2009

PRESS RELEASE

FOSSIL COLLECTION FINDS A PERMANENT HOME AT MANX MUSEUM

A collection of fossils, on loan to the Manx Museum for over seventy years, is to be donated to Manx National Heritage.

The fossils were collected from the limestone around Castletown by Joseph George Cumming, who was Vice-Principal of King William's College between 1841 and 1856. Kept in the College's library and museum after Cumming left the Isle of Man, the collection was eventually loaned to the Manx Museum in 1936 and has been stored at the Museum in the care of Manx National Heritage ever since.

With the assistance and advice of retired Head of Geography, Mr Bill Morton, the Trustees of the Bishop Barrow's Charity which administers King William's College have kindly agreed officially to donate the Cumming collection to Manx National Heritage.

The fossils represent marine life from 300 million years ago, when the land we now know as the Isle of Man was part of the floor of a tropical sea. Sea creatures represented include shelled animals, such as brachiopods and bivalves, trilobites, corals and goniatites, squid-like creatures with coiled shells like ammonites. Though most of the original information about where and when the fossils were found has been lost, the collection is still very useful for exhibitions, and a selection of specimens is currently on display in the Manx Museum's Natural History and Geology Galleries. In 1975 a new list of the Cumming fossils held by the Manx Museum was made by local geologist Eva Wilson, replacing an earlier catalogue which mysteriously never arrived there.

Cumming wrote a number of books and scholarly papers on aspects of local geology, including the first detailed description of the limestone rocks, presented to the prestigious Geological Society in 1845. He was also interested in the archaeology, landscape and local history of the Isle of Man and in 1848 published 'The Isle of Man, its History, Physical, Ecclesiastical, Civil and Legendary'.

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Kate Hawkins, Curator of Natural History at Manx National Heritage said:

"We are very pleased indeed to accept this gift from the College Trustees. The transfer of title of the collection is a firm step in securing its future for the benefit of the Island's community and as a memorial to the man who is surely the father of modern Manx geology".

Ends

Image Captions:



The 'handover ceremony' at King William's College. (Left to right) Kate Hawkins - Natural History Curator at Manx National Heritage, Helen Bates - Head Girl at King William's College, Lady Eva Wilson, Max Corkill - Head Boy at King William's College, Dr Sarah Welch - Principal of King William's College.



Some fossils from the Cumming collection

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