

**John Reekie MA
1899-1982
Geologist and Mineralogist**

John Reekie was born in Kircaldy, Fife on 1st June 1899 and educated at Cliftonbank School, St Andrews. In April 1916, aged 16 years and 10 months, he enrolled at Edinburgh University to study medicine. Following his 18th birthday, in June 1917, he was called up and commissioned in the Royal Field Artillery. Posted to France early in 1918, he saw action there throughout the final stages of the Great War.

Demobilised in late January 1919 he immediately gained a place at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Deciding not to continue with medicine he chose instead to read chemistry, mineralogy and geology. Among his most influential teachers was Dr W B R King who later became Woodwardian Professor of Geology.

Reekie graduated with a double First in 1921, and shortly thereafter took up the position of Mineralogist on a three year contract with the Geological Survey of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in Salisbury. During a highly productive period in 1922-24 he completed a large number of mineral determinations, but towards the end of 1924 he became very ill with a severe sinus infection, which required urgent surgery in Salisbury. His wedding, planned for Edinburgh, was cancelled and his fiancée joined him in Salisbury where they married. On medical advice, he resigned his post in May 1925 and returned to Scotland, enduring further surgery in Capetown on his way home, and again in Edinburgh on arrival. After a period of convalescence in Scotland, Reekie and his wife moved to Cambridge in search of suitable work. Over several months in the autumn of 1925 he undertook some work in the Mineralogy Department, and applied for a Departmental position. Cruelly, he was turned down because of his facial disfigurement and, although by now cured of his sinus problems, was advised to seek alternative employment.

The family was involved in business in London, and Reekie joined the firm as a partner. After a few years, the daily travelling to the City proved uncongenial and bad for his health, and in 1930 he purchased a fruit farm in what was then a rural corner of Essex between Billericay and Stock. Here he lived happily with his family until, in his own words, "it needed the urgency of another War for me to be acceptable and very much welcomed."

With a national shortage of schoolteachers in the Second World War, Reekie was persuaded to sell his farm and on 17th October 1944 he was appointed to the Royal Liberty School at Gidea Park, Romford, Essex, to teach science and mathematics, later extending his duties to include biology. So began his third career, and the one which was to give him his greatest fulfilment. In 1948, with support from an imaginative Headmaster, G H P Newth, "Dan" Reekie (as he had become known to Libertians) began teaching geology at Sixth Form level. The Royal Liberty thus joined an elite group of about a dozen schools in the UK to include geology in their syllabus.

His love of geology and the enthusiasm he had shown for his work in Africa made Reekie an inspirational teacher. The interpretation of maps, crystallography, mineralogy, stratigraphy, palaeontology and physical geology were taught in the field and in the laboratory with equal dedication and ability. Most memorable

were his annual Easter Field Weeks, conducted with great vigour, alternately in the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset, and the Craven Highlands in Yorkshire. From 1948 to 1962 Reekie's students achieved continuous success at A-level and at higher, scholarship levels.

Many professional geologists in academia, industry and government service today were introduced to their subject by John Reekie and have cause to be ever grateful to him.

He retired in 1962 and died in Belfast on 5th May 1982.

In 2004, some of John Reekie's former Geology students resolved to commemorate his life and inspirational teaching by means of the foundation of an annual Geology Prize in the Department of Earth Sciences at Cambridge University, a place he always loved.

*"We dedicate the **John Reekie Memorial Prize** to a man who shaped and changed our lives. The Prize is to be awarded every academic year, commencing in 2005, for the best field-work report submitted as part of the requirements for the Bachelor Degree."*