



Peter Friend 1934-2025

Peter Furneaux Friend was born in Edinburgh on 16th April 1934, son of Greville Furneaux Friend and Mary Dorothy Friend (nee Ritson). Peter's father was an academic biologist, latterly Senior Lecturer in Zoology in the University of Edinburgh. Peter grew up first in the family home in Mayfield Road. However, on the outbreak of war the family was evacuated to a cottage in Peebles, 40 kilometres south of Edinburgh. Peter and his brothers – one older and one younger – had happy memories of Peebles, except for the primary school, where they were bullied because of their posh Edinburgh accents.

At the end of the war, the family moved back to Edinburgh and Peter, aged 11 in 1945, started secondary school at Edinburgh Academy. His interest in Geology probably began about this time but, aged 18, rather than developing this interest at university, Peter was obliged to do two years of National Service (1952-54). He served in the Royal Engineers based at Norton Barracks, Worcester, being promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in May 1953.

Probably in 1954, Peter took up a place at Caius College, Cambridge University, to study Natural Sciences. A surviving application during that year to join the next Spitsbergen Expedition run by his Director of Studies, Brian Harland, clarifies Peter's courses and aspirations: "*1st YR Geol, Min & Zoo – aiming at Part II Geol. Great interest in Geol, Geog and Travel. Done quite a lot of camping, climbing and amateur geologizing in Wales and North & Central Scotland. Assos. Member Edinburgh Geol. Soc.*" He joined his first expedition to Spitsbergen in 1955, a trip which was to prove seminal to the earlier years of Peter's geological career.

There is an ambiguity in recorded dates for Peter's progress through the later 1950s. He should have graduated in 1957. Sometime after 1957 he began a PhD project on 'Devonian rocks of northern Spitsbergen,' which he finished in 1962. There are photographs of Peter on the Spitsbergen expeditions in 1955, 1957-58 (presumably his main PhD data collection years), and 1961-62. Peter appeared on the annual Sedgwick Club photos – the unofficial Geology Department photo – in 1956 then 1958-63 and 1965 onwards.

After completing his PhD, Peter had a post in the Scott Polar Research Institute. However, even then he taught for the Geology Department on the first year Easter field course to the Isle of Arran, the first

of numerous field courses that Peter led throughout his career. Related Arran research with Brian Harland and Alan Smith resulted in Peter's first published papers (1963-70). These were followed by more than a decade of papers on the non-marine Devonian: post-doctoral research on the Catskill Mountains (1966-67), his PhD research on Spitsbergen (1967-74) and contract work in East Greenland (1970-78). In this period, Peter and Graham Chinner designed and led a Part II field course to the Scottish Highlands that lasted until 1993.

A novel research project with John Allen on active intertidal dunes in Norfolk (1976) started about the time Peter was first doing field work in the Ebro Basin and related Cenozoic basins of Spain. The Spanish research, published in 1979-98, involved a succession of research students, a feature of Peter's career through till retirement in 2001. He supervised over 30 people working in his own core research areas as well as even more exotic areas: Antarctica, Siberia and Canada. They worked not only on non-marine clastic sediments but also on carbonates, evaporites and volcanoclastics.

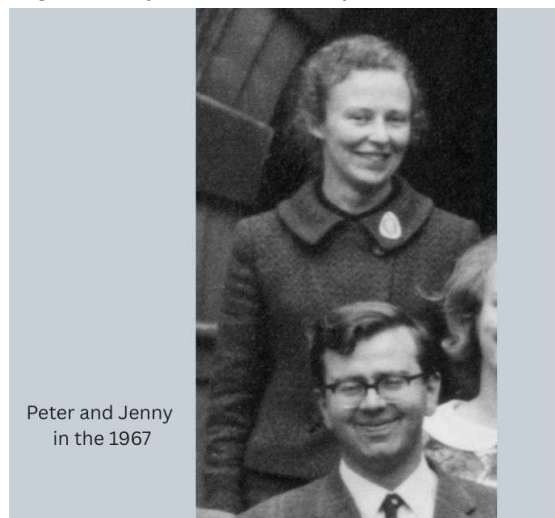
Both the Spanish and Norfolk research spawned Earth Sciences field courses designed partly by Peter, and eventually part of the new Part III fourth-year course set up in 1998-99. However, the Spanish course had an earlier history, being initiated by Peter with David Pyle in 1995 to replace the costly Highlands Part II course. David remembers that "Peter was an unflappable field leader, who wore his wisdom lightly. His affable nature endeared him to the students and made for a relaxed and sociable field class."



Peter's Spanish research work overlapped with more general and theoretical studies (1993-2005) and was eventually succeeded by field-based studies of the non-marine basins in the Himalayan foothills across both Pakistan and India (1994-2007) nations with a poor record of communication. This project was therefore a good test of what Gary Nichols called "Peter's gentle style of diplomacy that seems to have allowed him to work with anyone, anywhere." (Nichols *et al.* 2007 p. 2) such that, in the Spanish basins project "Even the rivalries...between different Geology departments in Spain apparently posed few problems."

After Peter's official retirement in 2001 his rate of production of papers slowed but citations of his papers continued to increase for the next two decades. This remarkable metric is testament to the high quality of Peter's field-based studies, which have matured like fine wines and over a similar timescale. Retirement, however, did end his highly regarded lectures and supervision teaching, although his field teaching in Spain continued until 2005. What lasted even longer were Peter's meticulously prepared practical demonstrations in the first-year sedimentology module. Some of the rock material that he gathered is still in use.

During the earlier part of Peter's 'retirement' he wrote and had illustrated two informative volumes in the attractive Collins New Naturalist Series on the geology and scenery of Southern England (2008) and of Scotland (2012). These books exemplify Peter's increasing emphasis on outreach beyond the academic geology community. Another example is Peter's involvement with CASP, formerly the Cambridge Arctic Shelf Programme. This not-for-profit geological research organisation grew out of Brian Harland's Spitsbergen expeditions, so that Peter naturally became involved. He was elected to the board of trustees in 1995, served as Chair from 1999 to 2011 but remained on the board until 2020, a quarter of a century of remarkable service.



Peter and Jenny
in the 1967



Perhaps Peter's most prominent outreach role was with the Friends of the Sedgwick Museum, the charity which exists to support the development of the Museum and to promote and publicise geology to a wider audience. Peter became Membership Secretary of the Friends at its formation in 2001 and took over as Chairman in 2009. Most importantly, he liaised between the Friends and the Earth Sciences Department, thereby facilitating meetings, lectures, publicity, publications, field trips and parties. Peter only stepped down as Chairman in 2019.

Formal recognition of Peter's research and outreach activity came in 2010 with the award of the Prestwich Medal of the Geological Society. Even more belatedly but deservedly, in 2015, Peter's Spitsbergen and Greenland expeditions and research were recognised with the Queen's Polar Medal. More important to Peter than either of these medals would have been the respect and warmth with which he was regarded by his colleagues and friends. In the many tributes sent to the Department

and the BSRG, the most common adjectives to describe Peter were – in increasing frequency – generous, lovely, humble, gentle and kind. Who else would deserve such an epitaph?

This obituary has been compiled with help from Helen Friend and from the fuller academic tribute of Gary Nichols, Edward Williams and Chris Paola (2007).

Nigel Woodcock

Nichols, G., Williams, E. and Paola, C. 2007. Sedimentary processes, environments and basins: a tribute to Peter Friend. In: Sedimentary Processes, Environments and Basins: A Tribute to Peter Friend. Special Publications of the International Association of Sedimentologists 38, 1–7.

Some photos from our archives



1956 – Church Stretton. Peter at the front.



1963 – Friend, McKie and Harland. From the Sedgwick Club photograph.



Svalbard, 1955 expedition. Group photograph



Peter, a colleague and Hundon the dog. Svalbard, 1955.



From the 1955 Svalbard expedition. Images around the campsite.



Skotte Hytta, 1958. Group photo.