

By: Dr Haydon Bailey

On those occasions when I have the privilege of awarding Curry Fund Certificates of Excellence to the projects which have benefitted from grants from the GA Curry Fund I always take the opportunity of saying a little about the man behind the name. Dennis Curry was "a kind, generous person, although always careful and prudent, rather serious and in some ways a little reserved – old fashioned in the very best way." (Alan Lord, in Whittaker, Robinson & Lord, 2010).

I got to know Dennis Curry personally whilst I was working on my PhD, as my research area overlapped with some of his own fields of interest. I now look back on our conversations with deep gratitude, in that I was able to chat freely to someone with a real depth of knowledge who took a genuine interest in the work I was doing, even at times when I wasn't sure about the value of my results. Some research tangents didn't always yield solid data, but these were exactly the areas which Dennis recognised as being of most interest.

This is not another Obituary for Dennis Curry – there were plenty of those in 2001 when he died, this is simply an opportunity to bring his legacy to the GA – the Curry Fund – and a few notes about the man himself, to a wider audience, so that the GA membership are aware that the GA Curry Fund is not a hidden account that pays for a meal out on Friday evenings after the Association lectures!

Dennis Curry was a child of his times, born in May 1912, the eldest son of a family of six. He was notably intelligent and just a little "exceptional at school". His father made the rash promise that if Dennis passed his Higher School Certificate a year early (at the age of 14) then he would be presented with a motorbike. Inevitably by 1927 Dennis was able to get himself to school on his own motorbike. He completed his school career a year early and took, what would be termed today as a "gap year" before proceeding to university. He spent this time motorcycling along the south English coast collecting fossils and beginning to understand what would become his passion, the stratigraphy of the Late Cretaceous and Tertiary sequences of the Anglo-Paris Basin and adjacent areas. In 1930 he arrived at Jesus College



Figure 1: Prof Dennis Curry

Cambridge having been awarded a scholarship and he went on to gain a double first in Natural Sciences. He followed this by being awarded the Harkness Scholarship which allowed him to stay in Cambridge for a further year's research (Hancock, 1989). He was obviously incredibly bright and dedicated to his chosen geological research fields in sedimentology, palaeontology and stratigraphy.

It was at this stage in 1934 that reality kicked in and, remember, Dennis was the eldest son in the family and so was destined to follow in his father's footsteps and enter the family business. This was Curry's electrical stores, which in the 1930's was supplying the fledgling wireless communication and entertainment market across England. Dennis lived in Bournemouth and commuted to London each week for work. He lived in London hotels during the week and when he wasn't committed to the family business, he processed and picked samples for their microfossil content and wrote up his results for publication. His first PGA paper was in 1937 focussing on Nummulites from the English Bartonian.

During World War II Dennis' radio expertise was not wasted when he joined the RAF and he spent his time training recruits to use the radio equipment they would sit next to during their forays over enemy territory. By the close of the war Dennis returned to the family firm taking over as Managing Director in 1946. It's worth noting that under his leadership the company grew from having 215 stores to running 550 locations by the time he retired in 1984 (Hensley & Muir, 2010).

Dennis was dedicated in his membership of the GA and in 1958, to mark the centenary of the Association, he gifted 10,000 Ordinary Currys Ltd. shares to the GA; at the time these had a nominal value of £14,000 (Leake et al., 2013). He recommended that these be kept as a long-term investment. During the 1960's - 70's he was recognised for his contributions to the GA with the Foulerton Award in 1962, he was President of the Association between 1964 and 1966 and became an Honorary Member of the GA in 1971. In this period he was still busy with his academic activities, and he became Visiting Professor of Marine

- 1912 Born, Leicester (May 18th)**
- 1927 Passed Higher School Certificate, a year early**
- 1930 Awarded Scholarship to Jesus College, Cambridge**
- 1933 Awarded Double First in Natural Sciences**
- 1933 Obligated to join family business, Currys Ltd.**
- 1934 Joined the Geologists' Association**
- 1937 First paper published in the Proceedings of the Geologists' Association**
- 1938 Appointed Company Director, Currys Ltd.**
- 1942 Joined RAF as radio/radar instructor**
- 1946 Appointed Joint Managing Director, Currys Ltd.**
- 1958 Gifted 10,000 Ordinary Currys Ltd. shares to GA – marking Centenary of GA; to keep as an investment**
- 1962 Awarded Foulerton Award by the GA**



Figure 2: (Left) Geoconservation Group in Brown Howe Quarry, Cumbria (2019 Geo-conservation Certificate). (Right) The travelling Rock Showman (Steve Cousins), who brings the earth sciences to hundreds of children across the northeast of England with his travelling rock circus show (2022 Geo-education Certificate)

Geology at UCL in 1971.

1984 saw the biggest change in Dennis Curry's prolific career when he retired from the family firm after 50 years, and it became a publicly listed company. Following this financially successful event, the GA were advised to invest the funds raised by the sale of the Curry Ltd. shares and to invest them as necessary. The GA Council at the time decided to use the dividends generated to provide grants for geological projects across the UK and thus the Geologists' Association Fund, as it was initially called, was established in 1986 with its first grants being awarded in April of that year. With typical reserve, Dennis Curry would not allow the fund to be named after him, however he relented by July 1988 and the Curry Fund name rapidly became established.

The Curry Fund story could be closed here, but that would be only the first chapter completed. Over the 36 years from 1986 to 2022 the Curry Fund gave a total of £799,783, let's call it £800,000, in grants and loans to over seven hundred geological projects. By 2018 the Fund committee felt it was time to celebrate the longevity and success of this unique venture and so the Curry Fund Certificate of Excellence was inaugurated celebrating those projects which each year best reflected the aims and objectives of Dennis Curry and his generous funding to the GA.

Each year the Curry Fund presents a minimum of two certificates, one for Geo-education and one for Geoconservation and awardees come from the funded projects which have been completed during the previous twelve months. They have ranged from geoconservation work by the Cumbria Geoconservation Group in Brown Howe Quarry, Cumbria (2019 Geo-conservation Certificate) to the travelling Rock Showman (Steve Cousins), who brings the earth sciences to hundreds of children across the northeast of England with his travelling rock circus show (2022

Geo-education Certificate).

During the Covid pandemic, geological fieldwork across the country was curtailed, just like many other activities, and applications to the Curry Fund consequently decreased, although they never quite dried up. With the start of 2023 more opportunities are arising to get out into the field, dig out a few exposures and start bringing the geological sciences to the attention of a wider audience. This is where the Curry Fund comes into its own, making financial assistance available for conservation work, information board construction, leaflet printing, website creation and a whole host of other outlets. Check out the guide for applicants on the GA website (<https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/curry/>) and just think what you might be able to achieve with a little bit of financial assistance from that polite gentleman from Curry's!

Further reading:

Hancock, J.M. 1989. Contributions to geology by D. Curry and C. W. Wright. Proceedings of the Geologists' Association, 100, 243-249.

Hensley, C. & Muir, L. A. 2010. The Dennis Curry Collection at the Natural History Museum, London. In: Whittaker, J. E. & Hart, M. B. (eds.) *Micropalaeontology, Sedimentary Environments and Stratigraphy: A Tribute to Dennis Curry (1912-2001)*. The Micropalaeontological Society, Special Publication, 11-15.

Leake, B. E., Bishop, A. C. & Howarth, R. J. 2013. The Wyley History of the Geologists' Association in the 50 years 1958-2008. The Geologists' Association. 140pp.

Whittaker, J. E., Robinson, E. & Lord, A. R. 2010. Dennis Curry, 1912 - 2001 - the professional amateur: an appreciation and bibliography. In: Whittaker, J. E. & Hart, M. B. (eds.) *Micropalaeontology, Sedimentary Environments and Stratigraphy: A Tribute to Dennis Curry (1912 - 2001)*. The Micropalaeontological Society, Special Publication, 1-9.

- 1964- 1966 President of the GA**
- 1967 Appointed Company Chairman, Currys Ltd.**
- 1971 Honorary Membership of the GA**
- 1971- 1984 Appointed Visiting Professor of Marine Geology, UCL**
- 1984 Currys Ltd becomes a publicly listed company; Dennis Curry retires**
- 1986 The Geologists' Association/Curry Fund established & the first grants awarded**
- 2001 Dennis Curry passes away at Selsey, West Sussex**
- 2010 Commemorative volume published by GSL celebrating the life of Dennis Curry**
- 2018 Curry Fund Certificate of Excellence established, celebrating 30 years of the Curry Fund awards, with over £630,000 given in grants and loans.**
- 2019 First Curry Fund Certificates of Excellence awarded**