PUBLIC LECTURE
26th September 2013

“A Journey to the Burgess Shale, British Columbia, Canada”

This meeting to be held at the University of Chester, Large Lecture Theatre: Binks Building, Parkgate Road, Chester. Tea and coffee served from 7PM. Talk will commence at 7:30PM.

Dr Jacqui Malpas of NEWRIGS, Geodiversity Wales and former Post-Doctoral Research Student at the University of Chester

Since discovering geology as an Open University undergraduate I have dreamt of visiting the most famous fossil site in the world; The Burgess Shale. This trip was my 60th birthday present.

The Burgess Shale was discovered as the result of two decisions. The first was Canadian Pacific Railway chose to run their line through the Rockies via Kicking Horse Pass; the second was that the Geological Survey of Canada sent their most experienced geologist, Richard McConnell, to map the geology on either side of the line. Thus in 1886, McConnell was the first geologist to find and collect from the Burgess Shale of Mt. Stephen, which overlooks the village of Field, British Columbia. McConnell's report attracted the attention of Charles Walcott a palaeontologist with the United States Geological Survey. Walcott eventually found the Phyllopod Bed Fossil Ridge, between Wapta Mountain and Mount Field, the main Burgess Shale site, in 1909, 23 years later. Charles Walcott's diary of 31st August 1909 reads:

'Out with Helena and Stuart collecting fossils from the Stephen Formation. We found a remarkable group of Phyllopod Crustaceans. Took a large number of fine samples to camp.'

The Burgess Shale, with its remarkable preservation of a diverse fauna with soft-body as well as skeletal parts was previously unknown. This site and its fossils provide a unique insight into animal life of the early Cambrian Period.

This talk will illustrate some of the history of the site and an overview of the fossils and how they changed the way the evolution of animal life of the Cambrian Period is understood and interpreted.