

R. Dixon (Editor)

A Celebration of Suffolk Geology: GeoSuffolk 10th Anniversary Volume

£20, ISBN: 0-9508154-7-0 (pbk); May 2012, Publisher GeoSuffolk, Ipswich.

As the title of this GeoSuffolk book indicates it is published to mark the 10th Anniversary of the Association. The Preface cites another justifiable motivation to publish namely to counter an alleged disparaging remark written ‘.....by a well-known geologist that “there is no geology in Suffolk”....’. The reader is also advised that the book doesn’t purport to be a ‘....geology of Suffolk...’ rather it aspires to provide ‘...a flavour of what Suffolk geology and geomorphology have to offer’.

The book editor says it will ‘appeal to the serious academic, the well-informed amateur and to the non-specialist – certainly it has visual ‘pick me up’ appeal in terms of front and rear covers, glossy paper, largish type face and an abundance of coloured and monochrome illustrations. On a practical note, it comprises 476 pages, is thus relatively heavy and because of the paperback outer covers proved ‘difficult to handle’ unless properly supported; unfortunately, after reading the volume a number of pages were separating from the binding. It does, however, retail at a commendable £20 – a price tag enabled by freely given contributions and financial support from a number of organisations and generous individuals.

The book is organised into five sections or ‘chapters’, each with a varying number of contributions from authors ranging from amateur to academic. The **Forward** and succeeding article provide the historical context to the conservation interests and efforts in Suffolk and in particular those of the GeoSuffolk association during the last decade. The chapter entitled **A Foundation** comprises nine contributions dealing mostly with geodiversity efforts in Suffolk including such initiatives as the Geologist Association’s Rockwatch (Suffolk Geology for Children), through to a niche group within our ever growing aging society (The U3A in Suffolk). The **Stratigraphy** is the chapter perhaps most relevant to the book’s title. It comprises 17 contributions covering the county’s geology sequence from the oldest and deeply buried Silurian strata proved in the Sutton Borehole, up through some 416 million years to the glacial history of the county concluding with the Palaeolithic archaeological record in Suffolk. The succeeding chapter **Some Geomorphology** is surprisingly short comprising three unrelated contributions – the Gulls of East Suffolk, The Orford Ness Shingle and The Halvergate Island hydrograph anomaly. The last chapter **Florilegium** comprises nine contributions including a short article on a 3D geological model for Ipswich, a short history of Geology at Ipswich Museum and the Pliocene Deli – a culinary trawl through the Red Crag. Importantly for some readers, most of the contributions include a wealth of useful references for additional reading and where relevant, contact details of ‘geo’ organisations in the county should the reader wish to get involved.

Given the title ‘Suffolk geology’ and an intended readership to include the non-specialist, it is surprising and certainly disappointing the book doesn’t provide a simple geological overview including making a distinction between the older bedrock sequence (pre 2.6Ma) and younger superficial deposits. Such an overview would provide the non geological reader invaluable

context for geological contributions ranging from general interest accounts of SSSI sites and local pits and excavations (numbers of which are overgrown or backfilled) through to detailed 'academic papers' (more akin to conference proceedings) for example, 'Preglacial rivers (Thames, Bytham), palaeosols and early humans in Suffolk' by Rose et al.; 'Deducing Glacial Behaviour in Suffolk' by Allen; 'The genesis and significance of the Middle Pleistocene glacial meltwater and associated deposits in East Anglia' by Gibbard and van der Vegt.

That said, there are a few contributions which attempt an overview (namely Geodiversity, Suffolk: An Introductory Excursion by Holt-Wilson; Suffolk Geology: my first impressions by Ainsworth; Remarks on Natural History in East Anglia and the Quaternary by West) but none fall within **Stratigraphy**.

This apparent oversight was remarked on by all of the non-geologists I showed the book to; the common issue raised was (and I paraphrase here) 'being confused within and between contributions'. This is pity as a number of the contributors are well placed to have written an authoritative and balanced overview. Another related criticism is that no specific mention is made of the 15 whole or part BGS 1:50 000 scale geological maps and 12 memoirs which cover the county; these (and an associated key map) would provide invaluable companion information aids.

Certainly, the reader gets the sense of the diverse interests of 'geology' in Suffolk and would find information about opportunities to get involved if so minded. For those 'well-informed amateurs' the book also provides contributions from numbers of key individuals who have published in peer reviewed journals not normally accessible to non academics. This bonus (in the absence of an overview) is mitigated somewhat (certainly for the non-specialist) by the wealth of detail provided and the complexity of some of the reasoned arguments presented. It is the case, despite years of research, that the ice age history of East Anglia remains controversial, both in terms of debates surrounding the age and number of glaciations to affect the region, and the specific nature of the glacial environments. It is therefore disappointing that the 'Middle Pleistocene' contribution includes numbers of dismissive but insufficiently qualified comments and references to authors who hold contrary views. Readers not acquainted with the relative merits of these polarised, strongly held viewpoints will be none the wiser and most likely perplexed.

Could the book have been better structured bearing in mind the wide potential readership, the disparate contributions, the range of information (archaeological, geological and geomorphological) and, importantly the range of detail provided? I believe so. In fact the last chapter title **Florilegeium** (defined by Wikipedia as 'a compilation of excerpts from other writings') might uncharitably describe the whole book. Despite these critical observations would I recommend it? A qualified yes.

Steve Booth

Thursday 26th July 2012