
Concluding Remarks

Harry Godwin

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Concluding remarks

BY SIR HARRY GODWIN, F.R.S.

The Botany School, Cambridge, CB2 3EA

The conclusion of this two day meeting finds us with a very great deal on which we may congratulate ourselves. In the first place there is the extremely large attendance, embracing scientists of all ages, and graced and illuminated by the attendance of many overseas colleagues of experience and distinction.

In the second place we have the great range of scientific disciplines that are now applied to our field of study, many now extremely sophisticated, and the corresponding extension of Quaternary Studies into fields of evidence not hitherto exploited. In the early days of palynology of laminated lake sediments one could write of deciphering the ‘annals of the lakes’, but beginning by reading the record of lakes, peat bogs, coastal, fluvial, glacial and periglacial geology, we have progressed to translating the long and detailed records of the deep oceans, and now the encapsulated history of the Arctic and Antarctic ice sheets. We have been introduced to the marvellous potential of the great CLIMAP Project, and all biologists in the British Isles at least will now have to consider whether their hypotheses of past biotic history satisfy the new principle that we can all see emerging as ‘McIntyre’s Gate’.

Thirdly, and importantly, we have been cautioned by *many* speakers against proceeding from inadequate or outdated assumptions, and to these cautions I would myself add the suggestion that much time, and some emotion, may be wasted in recognizing and correlating so-called ‘interstadia’: when everyone defines an interstadial for himself, little progress in communication between us is possible. Likewise it will help from time to time to consider the end to which our research is being directed: is it in effect the ancient and entirely proper goal of geological study, correlation, or is it the definition, equally proper, of the nature of former environmental conditions and the magnitudes of factors concerned therein? Or are we unwittingly and prematurely confusing these objectives? And if the evidence from different groups of organisms appears to be in conflict is not the conclusion that we need to know much more of the intimate biology and physiological ecology of the species themselves in natural conditions, and if it is objected that Devensian climates no longer obtain anywhere, surely the answer is to make use of phytotron techniques and reimpose artificially such conditions upon them?

All the convergent evidence on which we rightly congratulate ourselves has revealed how, by comparison with the rather clear and detailed familiarity we now have with the second half of the Devensian, over the first half there is still a deplorable cloak of ignorance broken only by shafts of illumination such as for the Chelford interstadial and the continuity of record of isotopic composition and fauna in deep oceanic sediments. What went on in this long period in the British Isles, a glacial period without glaciations, a sequence of quasi-interstadial episodes without woodlands, a time of insularity or of unity with the European land-mass?

It is not surprising that we remain so ignorant when subsequent glacial readvances and periglacial activity have destroyed so much, but we know from the Dutch and other mainland European records that in certain circumstances the field evidence remains: there is ample indication in this meeting of the enthusiasm to seek out such evidence here, and of the scientific

ability fully to exploit it. When our next symposium is held we may hope to hear a fuller story...it could hardly be a more eventful or stimulating one than that to which we have just listened and for which we should express our gratitude to the organizers, speakers, participants and hosts who have made it so successful and have so well inaugurated the scientific collaboration of our two learned Societies.