

Obituary: James Gordon Todd (1951-2018)



Gordon in his museum of Scottish mineralogy

Gordon was born in 1951, in Pune, India, where his parents worked as Church of Scotland missionaries. His father Bill ran the mission hospital, while his mother was a schoolteacher. The family returned to Scotland in 1957, and Gordon's interest in geology and natural history was nurtured on family holidays on the Ayrshire coast, Arran and around Montrose, where collecting became a favourite activity.

Most of Gordon's senior school education was at Greenock Academy, although he spent 1966 in Chingola, Zambia, where his father worked as a medical officer with the Anglo-American Mining Corporation. This provided him with fantastic opportunities for collecting minerals and insects. Even after returning to school in Greenock, Gordon revisited Africa during summer holidays to collect minerals, shells and insects. Following in his father's footsteps, he studied medicine at the University of Glasgow, graduating in 1975. Apart from a short period in New Zealand, his working life was spent in Scotland, where in the 1980s he became a consultant anaesthetist in Glasgow, working in surgery across several hospitals, and teaching students.

Gordon loved the outdoors, and was a passionate hill-walker, rock-climber, potholer and kayaker, and he deployed all these techniques in his mineral and fossil collecting. He collaborated widely on fieldwork and collecting with many other collectors (notably Kemp Meikle, David Anderson, Michael McMullen, Simon Ingram and David Green) and museum geologists from the Hunterian and National Museums Scotland. In 1994, he opened his museum of Scottish mineralogy in a secure and beautifully fitted-out building in his garden in Kilbarchan. Gordon loved sharing stories, science and specimens and the museum became something of a shrine for Scottish and visiting mineral collectors, as well as jealous museum curators. He lectured widely on minerals and collecting to a wide range of audiences, his sense of humour and enthusiasm giving his talks a unique and compelling flavour. As well as collecting specimens, Gordon purchased Scottish minerals and fossils, acquiring some wonderful old-time specimens from classic localities such as the Leadhills-Wanlockhead mining district, as well as newly collected material from collectors such as Stan Wood and Mike Wood. In 2010, he opened an indoor extension to his mineral museum to cover broader natural history themes and display shells, fossils and insect collections, as well as even more minerals.

Gordon was a member of the Geological Society of Glasgow from 1984 until his death. He served on the society's council and gave many presentations and talks on members' nights, covering his mineralogical and palaeontological collecting and research (see below). He was a co-author, with Dr Chris Burton, of the chapter on Trearne Quarry in the society's excursion guide to the Glasgow and Girvan area, published in 1992. He was also active in the Russell Society and the Paisley Natural History Society, among others.

In addition to medical research papers, he published a wide range of papers on Scottish mineralogy based on his collecting work, mostly in the UK Journal of Mines and Minerals. He was also very happy to lend and share specimens with museums, and his specimens were included in exhibitions at Girvan, Paisley Museum, Pollock House, National Museums Scotland, and the Hunterian, among others. In 2003, the Hunterian put on a major exhibit of his material – “The Cabinets of Dr Todd”, occupying several cases in the Euing Room of the museum. Gordon was one of a small number of contemporary collectors featured in the NMS book “Minerals of Scotland: Past and Present”, written by Alec Livingstone and published in 2002.

In 2012, a book “The Cabinets of Dr Todd”, celebrating his life and collections, was published by his family, but by this time he had begun to suffer from an aggressive form of dementia, which cruelly curtailed his active and sociable life. His wife Pamela, and “Team Todd” helpers, including his children, Chris and Claire, cared for him at home, until his eventual death in December 2018.

The quality, extent, scope and documentation of his collection, and the beautiful displays in his museum spaces mark out Gordon's collection as one of the most remarkable ever assembled in Scotland. He discovered new localities, rediscovered old ones, and loved working to enthuse others, and to preserve, document, and share Scotland's mineralogical heritage on a scale that few other individuals have matched.

John Faithfull, The Hunterian, University of Glasgow

Geological bibliography

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McMullen, M.J. and Todd, J.G. 1990. Mineralization of the Kinharvie Burn, South West Scotland. UK Journal of Mines and Minerals, No. 8, pp. 43-45.

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Ingram, S.M., Todd, J.G. & Anderson, D. 1992. Pyrite from Goat Quarry, UK Journal of Mines and Minerals, No. 11, pp. 8-10.

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Ingram, S., Anderson, D. & Todd, J.G. 1996. Powellite and scheelite from Coire Buidhe, Argyll. UK Journal of Mines and Minerals, No. 16, p. 14.

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Green, D.I. and Todd, J.G. 2000. Twenty Years in Minerals: Scotland. UK Journal of Mines and Minerals, No. 21, pp. 9-27.

NB Gordon also published a large number of medical research articles: these are not listed here. See e.g. https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?as_q=glasgow&as_sauthors=JG+Todd

Geological Society of Glasgow Presentations

- 1989 Feb. 23 The Cinderellas of Trearne (talk, and a display of minerals)
- 1990 Feb. 8 Muirshiel - Moors and Mines and Minerals (talk and a display of minerals)
- 1992 Feb. 14 Excellent Scottish Minerals collected in 1991 (display)
- 1994 April 28 Minerals with Fossils (display)
- 1996 April 25 New Facets of Scottish Gemstones (talk and display of gemstones)
- 2003 May 5 Tertiary Flora of the Isle of Skye (talk)
- 2004 May 13 The Mystery of Quartz Fingers (talk and display)
- 2005 May 12 Rock Art: A Thing of the Past? (talk)