

Benjamin Neeve Peach (1842–1925)

By John Mendum and Anne Burgess

Much has been written about Benjamin Peach, who worked for the Geological Survey in Scotland between 1862 and 1905. In concert with John Horne, Peach was instrumental in the mapping and deciphering of the Moine Thrust Belt in the NW Highlands and in the reinterpretation of the Southern Uplands. In his obituaries, written by John Horne and Edward Bailey, and the fulsome appreciation by Edward Greenly (1928), little mention is made of his personal life, yet he was married twice and the father of eight children, three of whom died young. This article provides a snapshot of the trials and tribulations of Peach's private and professional lives; for greater detail see the online version of this issue of *The Edinburgh Geologist*.

Ben Peach was born at Gorran Haven in Cornwall on 6th September, 1842, the youngest of 8 children to Charles William Peach (1800–1886) and Jemima Mary Mabson (1802/3–1882). Charles Peach was a Revenue Coast Guard and respected naturalist and geologist, notable for his discoveries of fossil fish and plants, mainly in Cornwall, and in 1854 of fossils in

the Durness Limestone Formation in northern Scotland. These finds attracted the attention of Sir Roderick Murchison who paid for the 17 year-old Ben Peach to attend the School of Mines in London (later Imperial College), after which on Murchison's



A young Ben Peach, image probably dating from 1862 when he first joined the Geological Survey aged 19. BGS image P575813.

recommendation he was appointed to the Geological Survey as an Assistant Geologist in January 1862.

Peach was one of the founding members of the Scottish Office of the Survey, formally created in 1867 with Archibald Geikie as Director, and in 1868 he was promoted to Geologist. His field maps from the late 1860s and early 1870s show that he was a good accurate mapper with the map face generally neatly annotated, and units clearly delineated and coloured. In contrast, on the obverse side are drawings (mainly pencil) or even paintings, whose subjects range from scenic views to animals and people, but also include diagrams, trial cross-sections, stratigraphical logs, and the odd calculation. Similar material fills Peach's field notebooks with the more attractive sketches, which emphasize the form of the subject, done in pencil, black ink, and watercolour. One landscape drawing (black ink) looking south in the Loch Eriboll area emphasizes the geological features and demonstrates Peach's intuitive ability to portray the geology in three dimensions. However, the order, way-up, and quality of the notebook contents are distinctly random. Geological notes and information, *sensu stricto*, are relatively rare, dates are not sequential, and several pages



Sheep, drawn in pencil with colour wash—detail from a larger sketch in one of Peach's field notebooks.

merely document the accounting of expenses.

Sadly, Peach's artistic abilities were not matched by his literary talents. Bailey's obituary states that '*He could scarcely bring himself to write or read.*'—far too harsh a judgement! However, his written contributions to memoirs were cursory. For the 'Southern Uplands' Memoir (Peach and Horne, 1899) Peach drew most of the abundant diagrams and maps, but made virtually no written contribution apart from the lengthy list of fossils in the Appendix. Even his literary contributions to the NW Highlands Memoir (Peach et al., 1907) were limited. Geikie, in

explaining the delays in producing the final manuscript, noted in the preface—*‘Some geologists find literary labour more irksome and arduous than field-work, and would rather survey many square miles of complicated ground than write a few pages descriptive of them.’* Presumably, it was Peach’s ideas, influence, and ‘management’ of such mapping, together with his seniority, that justified his first authorship of these two memoirs.

Although a small headquarters office had been set up in Edinburgh in 1867, the geologists spent most of their time in the field and treated their field address as their main residence. This peripatetic existence was unsettling and certainly created some problems for those with families. When in Edinburgh Peach was able to stay with his parents, but this situation changed when he married Jeanie Bannatyne (born 1846) from Springhill Farm, Douglas in 1871. Note that Peach had mapped the geology of the Douglas area in 1868. Subsequently, Jeanie gave birth to Charles William (1872–1949), Jeanie (1874–1975), Jemima Mary (1876–1887) and Christina Mowbray (1879–1883), all at Hassendean Cottage, Bakers Road, Gattonside, by Melrose. This period coincided with the time Peach was mapping in the Borders area and was

presumably resident at Gattonside. By the late 1870s Peach was the only field geologist still working in the south of Scotland. This rural existence changed around 1879–80 when he and his family moved to 8 Annandale Street in Edinburgh, close to his now-aged parents and sister Jemima at 30 Haddington Place.

Coincident with the Survey mapping of the Midland Valley and Southern Uplands in the 1860s and 1870s was the collection of fossils, both as stratigraphical markers and for populating a reference collection in Edinburgh. Thousands of specimens were acquired and their identification became an onerous task. Peach became much involved in this and in 1879 was appointed Acting Palaeontologist. Soon after he started mapping in the Highland Border around Callander and Aberfoyle, but continued to spend considerable time on palaeontological identification.

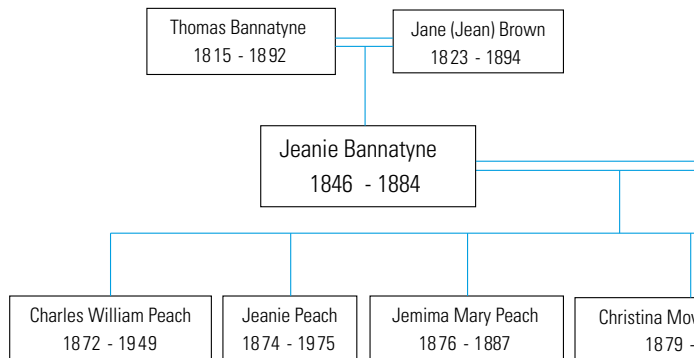
Following the departure of Archibald Geikie for London and James Geikie for the University of Edinburgh, Peach was effectively Acting Director for the Scottish Survey for over 2 years (1882–1884) in the absence of H H Howell. He was promoted to District Surveyor in 1883, the post carrying considerably greater responsibility, but attracting higher pay. Meanwhile, at home in

Annandale Street, Thomas Bannatyne (1880–1881) and Elizabeth Sarah (1882–1967) were born, but Thomas died when not 4 months old (at Springhill Farm, Douglas). In the following years Peach’s mother Jemima died (15th February, 1882), followed by his daughter Christina in 1883, and then sadly by his wife, Jeanie on 4th February, 1884. Jeanie’s cause of death is stated as haemoptysis, a common symptom of tuberculosis. Peach’s father was also now ailing and his sister Jemima was recorded in 1882 to be ‘in delicate health’. Amidst these domestic troubles Peach was charged with leading the work on the NW Highlands when the Survey commenced mapping in Sutherland in 1883. This followed Lapworth’s recognition of a major ductile and brittle shear zone at Loch Eriboll, now recognised as part of the Moine Thrust Belt, across which Lewisian, Torridonian, Moine and Cambro–Ordovician rocks had been translated westwards for several tens of kilometres. The work was arduous and the conditions

challenging, so much so that several of the geologists suffered from health problems. The Survey’s Annual Summaries of Progress in the 1880’s record the problems caused by the bad weather, the high ground, and the complex geology.

In February 1886 Peach’s father died at 30 Haddington Place leaving the house and estate (£571) entirely to his daughter (and Ben’s sister) Jemima. The following January his daughter Jemima died, aged 10, at 6 Annandale Street. However, later that year on 2nd November, 1887 Peach married Margaret Anne McEwen (1868–1921) at Kirkton in Assynt, where her father was the schoolmaster. Margaret (‘Maggie’) subsequently gave birth to Angus McEwen (1888–1909) and Benjamin Neeve (1891–1950), both at 13 Dalrymple Crescent, on the leafier south side of Edinburgh.

Peach family tree showing parents and children (for more generations see web version).

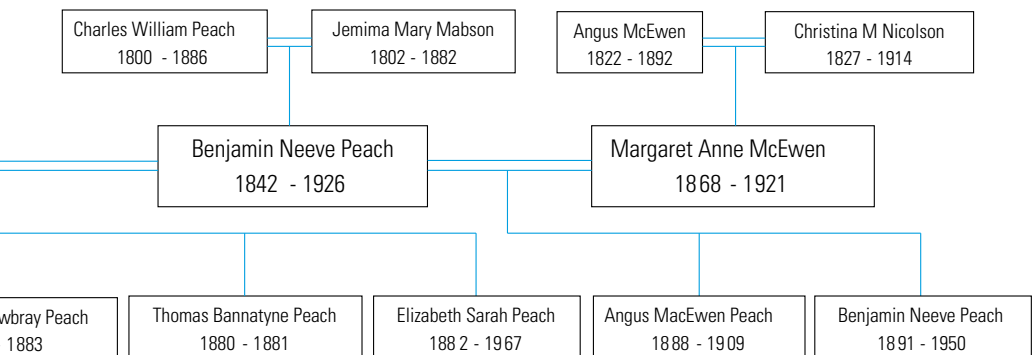


In the later 1880s and the 1890s Peach continued to map significant parts of the Moine Thrust Belt and the northern Highlands. The field mapping was in addition to his ongoing responsibilities as District Surveyor and Acting Palaeontologist. It had also become apparent that a full revision of the Southern Uplands was necessary, taking cognisance of Lapworth's graptolite zoning and revised stratigraphy. This field work started in 1888 and occupied Peach and Horne for some 8 years in the autumn, winter and early spring, leaving the late spring and summer months free for Highland work. Peach was only effectively confined to the office in 1897 to ensure completion of the diagrams and maps for the resulting memoir (Peach and Horne, 1899).

Early in 1891 Peach and his family moved to 86 Findhorn Place. As he still spent a great deal of time

in the field in the 1890s, his young wife was left to run the household in Edinburgh, albeit with domestic assistance. She was required to look after her two growing sons, and the extended family that included her stepson Charles William, and stepdaughters, Jeanie and Elizabeth Sarah ('Lizzie'). Peach's ailing sister Jemima, also needed care; she died in 1899, whilst resident at Findhorn Place. Peach's eldest son, Charles William graduated from Edinburgh University in Medicine in 1895.

In 1901 the Survey was reorganised under J J H Teall following Archibald Geikie's retirement in March of that year. In Scotland, Horne was promoted to Assistant Director, whilst Peach continued as District Geologist until his retirement in 1905. Peach had been a loyal supporter and true friend to Archibald Geikie throughout his tenure and wrote a heartfelt letter



expressing his gratitude immediately prior to his retirement. In practical terms Peach had benefited from being a Geologist for 15 years and District Surveyor for 18 years, whereas for many of his colleagues there had been no sensible career structure. Some had remained as Assistant Geologists for as long as 21 years with only limited pension provision.

Following retirement in 1905 Peach was a regular visitor to the Scottish office in 33 George Square, where he continued to check maps, supply data and text for memoirs, and undertake limited palaeontological work for many years. The publication of the NW Highlands Memoir (1907) and the construction of 3D plaster-cast models illustrating the geology of the Assynt area (from 1904 onwards) had generated considerable interest both nationally and internationally. Hence, the British Association field meeting to Assynt in September 1912, led by Peach and Horne, was attended by a cross-section of the geological establishment of both Great Britain and Europe. Peach had assisted with classes at the University of Edinburgh during the latter part of his Survey career and continued in retirement. He was awarded an honorary LL.D. in 1903. He served on the council of the Royal Society of Edinburgh between 1905–8 and 1911–12, and acted as Vice President between 1912

and 1917. The Geological Society of London had jointly awarded Peach and Horne the Murchison Medal in 1899, and they were awarded the Wollaston Medal in 1921.

Peach in a letter to W B Wright dated May 30th, 1913 alluded to his wife, but when Maggie died of breast cancer on 20th October, 1921, she was resident in Kingussie and her death was registered by her son, Ben. Thus, in the 1920s Peach found himself alone in Edinburgh with his family scattered across parts of the UK and in New Zealand. Together with Horne his main project was writing the text and preparing diagrams for a volume describing the Geology of Scotland. This work remained unfinished at their deaths, but the existing material on Highland areas was collated by M Macgregor and published posthumously in 1930, entitled 'Chapters on the Geology of Scotland'.

Peach died on 29th January 1926, with the cause of death listed as cerebral thrombosis and gout. He had been ill for some time and was resident with his niece Elizabeth Hay and her husband William Marshall, at 33 Comiston Drive. He left £5115 12s 3d in his will. The funeral service at the graveside in Morningside cemetery on February 1st was attended by his son Ben and his two daughters, several grandsons,

members of the Bannatyne family, and by numerous representatives from the survey and local geological community. The cemetery, which dates from 1878, was privately owned for many years. However, in 1992 it was purchased by Edinburgh Council as its administration, records and upkeep had become problematical, with housing built on some parts. At its western extremity, where Peach's grave is situated, a small part of the cemetery remains private, now fenced, gated, and rather overgrown. The concise description on Peach's rough granite gravestone has lost much of its lead lettering. His wives and children are buried elsewhere.



Peach's gravestone in Morningside Cemetery.

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http://www.edinburghgeolsoc.org/eg_pdfs/issue57_peach.pdf