

William David Ian Rolfe PhD, FRSE

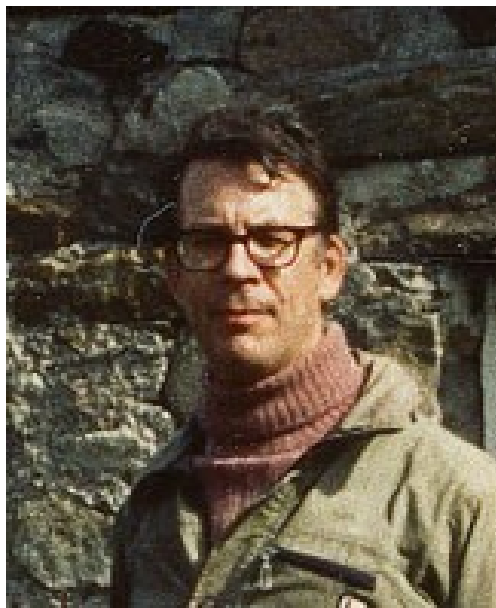


Photo: Dr Keith Ingham

Born in Hornchurch, Essex in 1936 and educated at the Royal Liberty Grammar school, Ian was inspired there by geology teacher John “Dan” Reekie. He graduated BSc, PhD in geology (1960) from Birmingham University with a thesis on *Silurian inliers of the Midland Valley of Scotland*. This redescribed the large pod-shrimp *Ceratiocaris* which led to his *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology* (1969) on this ancestral group.

Harry Whittington FRS recruited Ian to curate non-trilobite arthropods at Harvard’s Museum of Comparative Zoology (1961–1962). *Treatise* funding permitted him to revise several other groups of arthropod, notably the two-metre long millipede-like Carboniferous *Arthropleura*.

In 1962 Ian became a curator at the Hunterian Museum of Glasgow University (deputy director, 1981–1986). He joined the 1967 joint expedition to Gogo, a Devonian locality in Western Australia, collecting 1000 fishes, mostly new, and 2000 pod-shrimps. To celebrate the 1983 bicentenary of the Hunterian’s founder, Ian published Hunter’s manuscript on the giant Irish “elk” and Stubbs’s *Moose* painting.

From 1986 to 1996 Ian was Keeper of Geology at the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh (NMS). There, he established a major project to ensure that rare fossils of the world’s earliest assemblage of fully terrestrial amphibians, then being excavated at Bathgate by Stan Wood, were recorded and purchased for NMS. Previously, he scripted a Hunterian exhibition about Stan Wood’s fossils which travelled widely in UK. He also project-managed input to the new Museum of Scotland *Beginnings* gallery.

Ian joined the Geological Society of Glasgow 1962, serving as secretary (1972–1973), editor (1967–1972) and president (1973–1976), and contributing to the society’s excursion guide to the Glasgow and Girvan area, published in 1992. He was president also of the Geological Society of Edinburgh (1989–1991), the Palaeontological Association (1992–1994) and the Society for the History of Natural History (1996–1999). Ian is a Fellow of the Geological Society (1960), Museums Association (1972) and the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1983). He has published almost 200 papers.

Awards: Murchison Fund of the Geological Society of London (1978); Coke Medal (Geological Society of London 1984); Clough Medal (Geological Society of Edinburgh 1997).

Ian died on 26 September 2025.