

Earth *heritage* EXTRA

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Village celebrates 'the map that changed the world'

Janie Hextall, Churchill Heritage Centre

It is 200 years since William Smith (1769-1839) published 'the map that changed the world' and the north Oxfordshire village of Churchill is celebrating this bicentenary of one of its famous sons.

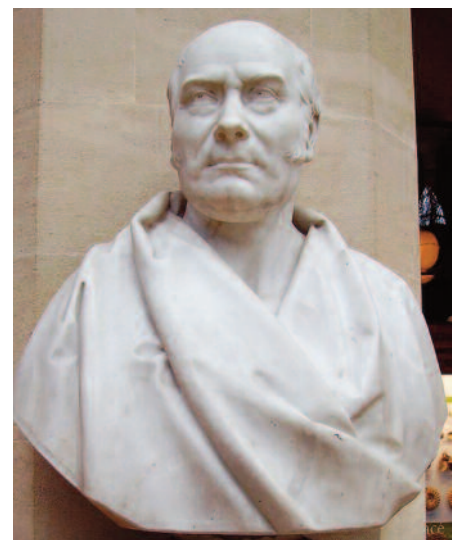
On 22 March 2015, the day before his 246th birthday, a plaque commemorating William Smith's birthplace was unveiled at the Churchill and Sarsden Heritage Centre by Professor Hugh Torrens, Emeritus Professor of History of Science and Technology at Keele University. We are grateful to the Geologists' Association Curry Fund, whose grant has made the plaque possible.



Above, the original William Smith map
Photo CCo 1.0

Left, Hugh Torrens with the plaque unveiled at the Churchill and Sarsden Heritage Centre

Photo Jenny Aston Photography
Below, a bust of William Smith at Oxford University Museum of Natural History
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We are delighted that, as part of its mission to help a broader audience understand William Smith's work, The Oxford University Museum of Natural History is curating a special exhibition in the Heritage Centre to mark the bicentenary. The museum has a particular interest because William Smith's nephew, John Phillips, who travelled extensively with his uncle, became an eminent geologist in his own right, wrote the first biography of William Smith, founded what is now the OUMNH and bequeathed to it a collection of Smith's maps and other documents.

Continued on following page

From preceding page

On loan are original maps, diaries and letters, and there are specially commissioned audio recordings giving the background to the story of the famous map and explaining how the William Smith collection came to be archived in the museum in Oxford.

The Heritage Centre is in the chancel of Churchill's medieval church and is all that remains of the original building. It is in a delightful setting, overlooking the Swail Brook valley and the 'lost' village destroyed by fire in 1684. The permanent displays and interactive touchscreens dedicated to William Smith and Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of India (also Churchill born), are still available, together with archive material, village and family records, photographs and maps.

William Smith was born in the village and legend has it that it was the poundstones (echinoids) he found in the local fields that sparked his interest in geology. While working on the construction of the Somerset Coal Canal in the 1790s, Smith noted "regularity in the direction and dip of the various Strata in the hills around Bath". Spotting that rock layers occurred in a predictable pattern, he also realised that certain fossils were characteristic of particular strata and that these fossil assemblages could be used to order strata in terms of relative age – his Principle of Faunal Succession.

Smith produced a pioneering table of the strata near Bath in 1799 and a colour-coded geological map of the area. Then in 1815 he published his landmark hand-coloured geological map of England, Wales and part of Scotland: the first to be created in such detail and scale. This was an incredible feat which challenged current scientific and religious thinking and which he accomplished largely on his own (with support from John Phillips). In 1831 the Geological Society of London awarded Smith the first Wollaston Medal and the President, Adam Sedgwick, referred to him as 'the Father of English Geology'. He had laid the foundation for geological mapping the world over – an astounding legacy for a humble blacksmith's son from a small Cotswold village.

Find out how to visit: www.churchillheritage.org.uk

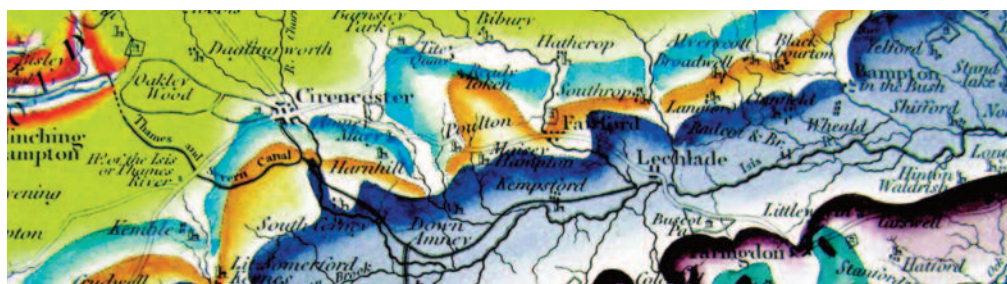
Rare Smith map on show for first time

William Smith; colours beneath your feet is an exhibition exploring the life of William Smith and the making of his 1815 geological map. The centrepiece of this exhibition is a very rare canvas mounted travelling copy of the map (series b, 22) in pristine condition which will be on public display for the first time from 23 May to 19 September 2015 at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery. The exhibition, like Smith, will travel the country connecting people through science, history and art, 'on a tour of inquiry and observation'.

More details: www.dudley.gov.uk/see-and-do/museums/dudley-museum-art-gallery/



The memorial to Smith in Churchill
Photo Tom Sharpe



Extract from William Smith's map, showing the geology of the area around Cirencester.

© Colours beneath your feet

Cross-section from Smith's 1815 map showing strata tilted like 'slices of bread and butter'.

© Colours beneath your feet

