

PALAEONTOLOGY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY CULTURAL CONTEXT

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The founding years of geology, in the early nineteenth century, thrived on individualism and laissez faire. In contrast, geology in the twentieth century has had to work within the increasing straitjacket of institutionalisation. This has been a major development in science in the twentieth century. The use of fossils in geology had historically grown from private passions and simple expediency. In the twentieth century fossils became 'cultural property' and consequently bound up in legislation which sought to protect the interests of peoples and nations. As such the movement of fossils became severely constrained in some instances and moral pressures placed on museums prevented these fossils from entering the public domain. National schemes for site conservation also sought to legitimise practice, which saw amateurs and dealers, once the cultural mainstay of the science, temporarily pushed to one side. The economics and politics of institutionalised science have put pressure on museums and universities to remodel their output, and to demonstrate accountability, income generation, and so on. As a result traditional studies, such as taxonomy, have shrunk in importance or been remodelled according to fashion. Research direction, as reflected by individual members of staff, increasingly became a pawn of strategic management. This paper discusses some of the cultural constraints and opportunities which have modelled practice in palaeontology in the twentieth century.