

STRATIGRAPHY IN THE 20TH CENTURY.

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The major elements of the Stratigraphic Column in use today were already in place by 1850. By then the idea that a palaeontological identity of best fossils (like ammonites) indicated an equivalence in geological time was also accepted. By 1900, thanks to the work of people like Henry Shaler Williams (USA) and Sydney Savory Buckman (UK) stratigraphic sequences were being studied with great precision in an attempt to create biochronological time scales, especially for the Jurassic Period. Buckman had demonstrated how highly diachronous particular lithologies were from 1889 and equally how well ammonites and other such rapidly evolving fossils could discriminate time. But from 1960 with new demands for energy, the study of fossils had grown both boring, out of date and expensive. Many new stratigraphic techniques, which ignored - or worse assumed an equivalence of - time instead evolved. Fossils by their specific characters give a uniqueness to time discrimination. Newer methods often rely on binary repetitions which are not unique to time, and which may give a false precision. Chronological precision must remain the essence of stratigraphic endeavour.