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Notes

This section of *SHALE* provides an opportunity for contributors to present the partial results of ongoing research, publish less-than-normal-length articles, and provide “interesting facts”.



An ammonite for *SHALE*—by Nick Doe

Museums aren't what they used to be. Nowadays, displays are interesting and informative, designed to catch the eye and hold the attention. But I'm old enough to remember when it was different. Long glass cabinets, crammed with shards and other artifacts—all often unrecognizable as complete objects (those were all in bigger museums) and all invariably labelled, unhelpfully and collectively, as “Roman” or some such, with only the vaguest of dates.

Inevitably, the geology cabinet, equally crammed, would have a selection of ammonites, for ammonite fossils are very common. Thousands of species lived in all the oceans of the world for hundreds of millions of years. But in spite of their familiarity, it wasn't until I saw a film of a

real-life *nautilus*, a modern cousin of the ammonites, that I had much idea of what these fossils were all about. These guys weren't just sea snails. They were active predators. They had eyes; they manoeuvred by squirting jets of water from their siphons; and they adjusted their buoyancy by filling and emptying their chambered shells. Oh sure, they may not have been as smart as other *cephalopods*—squids and octopuses—but that didn't stop them preying on and competing successfully with fish for a living.

Along with 40% of all life on earth, the ammonites became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous, 65 million years ago, probably because none of their planktonic young survived the months of darkness that followed the impact of the now-famous “kill-all-the-dinosaurs” meteorite.



So what's all this to do with *SHALE*? Well, being a museum journal and all, I think at least one issue of *SHALE* ought to have a picture of an ammonite. It's a "musty" tradition—so to speak. Our museum might not be able to come up with a specimen as beautiful as that shown on the previous page, but make no mistake, ammonites were here. The photograph above is of a specimen found by Paul Smith in the cliffs near the cemetery. Not world class, granted, but it is Gabriolan. No further excuse is needed to show it here. ◇

Come and gone again—this time for good?—by Barrie Humphrey

Although we know something about the family history of many of the settlers who pre-empted land on Gabriola in the 1860s and 70s, there are others whose lives remain a mystery. One such pre-emptor was a self-styled "gentleman" by the name of Robert Peel Dombrain. As noted in previous *SHALEs*,¹ we started out knowing nothing

¹ Barrie Humphrey, *Come and gone*, *SHALE* No.2, p.36, March 2001 and *Come and gone again*, *SHALE* No.5, pp.42–3, December 2002.

more than his name, which appeared in the Nanaimo directory of 1869, and again in 1871, but then disappeared forever.

The christening of his son, James, in 1864 and his marriage a year later, to See-ate-a-sult of the Sechelt (called Lucy), in Nanaimo's St. Paul's Church, later turned up in the archives of the Anglican Diocese of Columbia in Victoria. With the help of Nicholas d'Ombraïn of New Brunswick, a relative who responded to the posting of the name on the museum website, information from the Victoria records eventually led to the identification of his parents and family in Canterbury, Kent.

At that point, his trail in British Columbia seemed to stop. We could find nothing prior to 1864 and nothing since the 1871 directory. We knew nothing of why, how, or when Robert arrived on the west coast, nor of what caused the family to disappear from Gabriola and Nanaimo without a trace. Worse, we could think of nowhere else to look.

But "fortune", as Louis Pasteur once said, "favours the prepared mind". Last December, during another visit to the Anglican Archives to look for some of the...