Taylor, Michael A (Research Associate) and Torrens, H. S. (2016) *A lost ichthyosaur from the Lower Lias figured in William Buckland’s Bridgewater Treatise of 1836, and possibly owned by the Geological Society of London or Viscount Cole F.G.S., later Earl of Enniskillen (1807-1886).* The Geological Curator, 10 (6). pp. 281-282. ISSN 0144-5294

http://repository.nms.ac.uk/1782

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We are seeking a lost ichthyosaur, which William Buckland (1784-1856) figured in his famous Bridgewater Treatise: a 'young Ichthyosaurus communis, in the collection of the Geological Society of London, found in the Lias at Lyme Regis' (Buckland 1836, vol. 1, p. 170fn., vol. 2, p. 21, plate 8, fig. 1, reproduced as Figure 1 here).

One of us first attempted to identify the two ichthyosaurs in Buckland's plate in the 1990s (http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/anning.html, accessed 29 November 2016). One of the two ichthyosaurs has now been located, and confirmed from documentary evidence as a specimen collected by Mary Anning (1799-1847) of Lyme Regis (Taylor 2014). The other ichthyosaur, the subject of this note and perhaps also an Anning specimen, could not then be found except for a plaster cast at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH J.10341/p, Figure 2), and records of another plaster cast formerly at the Bristol Institution for the Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts.

More recently Judy Massare (pers. comm. 2014) has independently recognised and located the OUMNH cast, and found a second at the Sedgwick Museum, University of Cambridge (CAMSM X.50259). Unfortunately the provenances of the two casts are unknown, and neither cast bears label data (Eliza Howlett, pers. comm. 2014; Matt Riley, pers. comm. 2012, 2014).

This Bristol cast was probably destroyed in a 1940 air raid. It poses a problem because it was seemingly donated in 1832 by William Willoughby Cole F.G.S. (1807-1886) (City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Geology MS. No. 14, Catalogue of Fossil Reptiles, p. 13, item 9; Cb register, entry for Cb2338; Geology File 008; OUMNH specimen file for J.10341/p). By implication, therefore, the original was in Cole’s collection, contrary to Buckland’s Geological Society attribution.

This obvious conflict of owner/donor provenance makes it hard to trace the original ichthyosaur’s fate. We are therefore seeking information on further copies of casts of this attractive little ichthyosaur in the hope of independent provenance data - and also, of course, the original ichthyosaur itself. It is worth bearing in mind that Buckland’s plate was notably tidied up compared to reality (Figures 1, 2); and that William Willoughby Cole was styled Viscount Cole until his father died in March 1840 and he himself...
became the third Earl of Enniskillen, so any donations could be listed under one of those alternative names.

References


Figure 1. Lost ichthyosaur specimen, from the original illustration by Buckland (1836, pl. 8, fig. 1), stated there to be Ichthyosaurus communis from the Lower Lias of Lyme Regis, in the Geological Society of London. Note that the drawing has been tidied up for clarity, omitting certain loose bones present in the original (compare with Figure 2). The original was evidently a fairly small specimen, about 42 inches long (107cm) in a straight line from end of snout to tip of tail as scaled from the drawing, which acceptably matches actual measurement from known casts (Figure 2). Also notable is the broad forepaddle with six digits.

Figure 2. OUMNH J.10341/p, cast of the same ichthyosaur showing the actual state of the original skeleton, 108 cm in a straight line from snout to tip of tail (Eliza Howlett, pers. comm. 2014). Elements of the right side of the head appear to have been scattered beside the jaw and the pelvic region as seen. The animal was evidently buried lying on its left side, preserving this side in good order compared to the right side bones which were exposed to decay and scavenging. It was then prepared from the bottom upwards as found. © Oxford University Museum of Natural History.