
The pioneering early 19th century English geologist Adam Sedgwick is best known for having discovered and named the Devonian and Cambrian periods, based on extensive field mapping of the rocks in different parts of Britain and Europe. He was a defender of catastrophism and argued strongly against uniformitarianism that was gaining ground during his life time, and he played a leading role in the debate between creation and evolution. He taught geology in the field to Charles Darwin, and was later highly critical of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural succession; nonetheless the 2 scientists remained close friends until their dying days.

2018 marks the 20th anniversary of his appointment at Woodwardian Professor of Geology at the University of Cambridge. This, the first full-length biography of Sedgwick, situates his geological work into a life rich in variety and colour. He was a complex and fascinating character—an ordained minister in the Church of England and a friend of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert; he campaigned against the slave trade, and helped shape the reform of Oxford and Cambridge Universities.