

Reminiscences of Prof. Brian Frederick Windley

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Abstract: “Time flies but memories last forever.” Reminiscing about my close association with Prof Brian Windley, fills my heart with gratitude and reverence that one owes to a mentor and scholar par excellence. I feel elated to mention that I had the privilege to visit Leicester University in 1987, on a post-doctoral Leverhulme Commonwealth Fellowship. Whether it was our work on the inverted metamorphic zones in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya or a field excursion right up to the tip of Scotland, or the collaborative study on Mg-Al Sapphirine-bearing high-grade granulites from southern India—all enriched me with innovative findings for our research which were brought out by the then leading journals. It has been very aptly said that “the pursuit of excellence with unrestrained passion can lead to the accomplishment of wonders with unsurpassed joy.” Prof Windley exemplified the same throughout his life. Not only a treatise of more than four hundred research papers, but also a nonpareil and epochal book, “The Evolving Continents” (1977) epitomises his scholarly acumen. Crowned with Bigsby Medal (1977), the Murchison Medal (1985) by the Geological Society of London and the Leopold von Buch Medal of the German Geological Society, DGGV (2016), the University of Helsinki’s Bronze Medal, Prof. Windley was made Honorary Fellow of the Geological Society of America. In the words of Oscar Wilde, “Memory is the diary that we all carry about with us.” Prof. Windley’s departure is an irreparable loss to all of us. We offer our sincerest tribute and deep gratitude to him. May his soul rest in peace!

Index Terms: Barrovian Metamorphism, Darjeeling -Sikkim Himalaya, Evolving Continents, Metamorphic Petrology, Sapphirine-bearing granulites

I. INTRODUCTION

Prof. Brian Windley was an illustrious Geologist with ever-smiling face, cool temperament and a gifted human being. The vast horizon of his proficiency welcomed scholars from all over the world. I had been extremely fortunate to cherish an opportunity to be a part of his fraternity, a dream flight of a

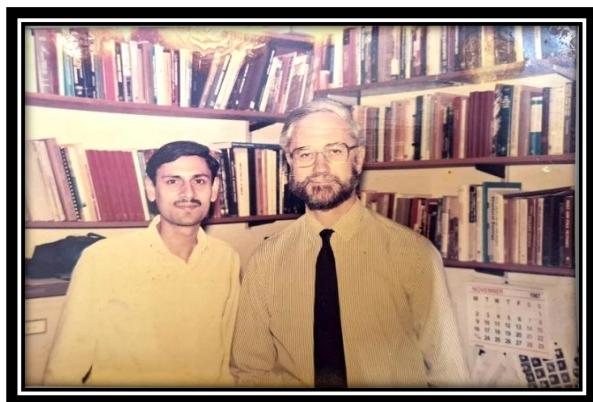
budding Lecturer from Banaras Hindu University, India to Leicester University, United Kingdom. Interestingly, Leicester University was founded in 1921 to create a living memorial for all the

local people who made sacrifices during the World War I. Reminiscing my close association with Brian, it is worth mentioning here that I had the privilege to visit Leicester University, with Roopa, my wife, in the year 1987, on a post-doctoral prestigious

Leverhulme Fellowship for a period of ten months (The Leverhulme Trust was established in 1925 following the death of William Hesketh Lever, the 1st Viscount Leverhulme. He left a large portion of his shares in Lever Brothers (now Unilever) to fund [research and education scholarships](#). His massive fortunes were driven by the global success of Sunlight Soap manufactured during World War I). On our arrival at Leicester in freezing cold of minus 19 degrees Celsius, both Judith and Brian were waiting to greet us with warm British courtesy.

Working alongside such a legendary figure in tectonics—while mastering electron probe microanalysis (EPMA) and thermodynamic modeling—is a profound milestone in a geoscientific career. It is a matter of pride, that with Prof. Windley, I learnt novel techniques at Leicester University to evoke a powerful combination of microscopic observations, high resolution analytical data (EPMA) and measurements quantifying thermodynamic regime in Metamorphic Petrology. We worked on the inverted metamorphic zones in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya because Himalaya were very close to his heart and published our contribution in the top rated

"Journal of Metamorphic Geology" ¹. Inverted metamorphism is a striking geological phenomenon in the Himalaya documenting metamorphic sequences characterized by peak metamorphic temperatures increasing structurally upwards. Geoscientific community has attributed inversion metamorphism to several overlapping tectonic processes to corroborate why the low-grade rocks lie beneath the high-grade rocks. During my academically productive stay at Leicester University, we also enjoyed a joint field excursion right up to the tip of Scotland to examine the first-hand look at the classic Metamorphic zones as part of the Barrovian metamorphism in Scottish Highlands that were first mapped by George Barrow in 1912. Walking under frost bite conditions in the Scottish Highlands—from the low-grade Chlorite zone up to the high-grade Sillimanite zone—was a rite of passage. More confidence gathered during the later part of my stay, and I engaged Brian's practical tutorials while he was lecturing elsewhere. It was a delight to witness his huge personal library with rich collection of books, journals and reprints in the basement of his lovely house. Seeing it first-hand with the author of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Earth Science section was an unforgettable experience. The complete set of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was nicely stacked on the shelves of his library. Our mutual collaboration continued further on the most fascinating Mg-Al Sapphirine-bearing high-grade granulites from southern



India was brought out as a publication by a world class peer reviewed journal². These silica-deficient sapphirine-bearing granulites characterize a new regime of ultra-high metamorphism that offer a window into deep continental crust. Words fall short to pen down a panegyric to honour my guide, philosopher and friend. Dr. M. Ramakrishnan, GSI and Dr. S.M. Naqvi, NGRI were closely associated with Prof. Windley⁴. Had I been a poet would have written an elegy to express the pain and sorrow on losing my trusted and empathic guide. Under his expert mentorship my research potential was enriched during post-doctoral studies at Leicester University.

Born on January 19, 1936, in Great Malvem, Prof. Windley had pursued his Doctorate from the University of Exeter. Later he was associated with the Geological Survey of Denmark. He started his teaching career from the University of Leicester as a

Lecturer of Geology from 1968 onwards.

His wide-ranging research programmes extended to Africa, India and Scotland and beyond. He also worked on deeply eroded Cordilleran batholiths in Chile, California and British Columbia for comparison with deeply eroded Precambrian orogenic belts.

He made very significant contributions for the furtherance of the study of Geology in light of plate tectonics. His bestowal "The Evolving Continents" (1977) became an epitome of his scholarly acumen. It may not out of place to mention here that he shared the joy of life with his wife Judith on these continents before writing this masterpiece book. Undoubtedly, the book was beautifully produced, superbly illustrated, carefully researched, convincingly argued and gracefully presented. It is still on the reading list of the Geology courses worldwide. Prof Windley enthusiastically brought out new editions of his famous treatise "The Evolving Continents"³ in 1984 and 1995. The academic outcome of his outstanding scholarly pursuits as a prolific writer was a treatise of more than four hundred research papers.

Prof. Windley was crowned with Bigsby Medal (1977) and the Murchison Medal (1985) by the Geological Society of London. He has to his credit the Leopold von Buch Medal of the German Geological Society, DGGV (2016). A distinguished scholar of rare eminence, he also received the University of Helsinki's Bronze Medal and was made an Honorary Fellow of the Geological Society of America. His retirement in 2001 did not stop him from his innovative explorations and love of ongoing research. He continued to render his services as an Emeritus Professor at University of Leicester. He was also a Visiting Professor at various universities in Japan and China since then.

II. EPILOGUE

Prof. Windley was a scholar, par excellence, whose contribution has made a landmark in the study of our planet earth. He always inspired his scholars with a deep passion and desire explore about incredible saga of the rocks. Prof Windley was a virtuoso whose name would be emblazoned in the history of Geology. His ideas, teachings, and the achievements of his students will continue to reflect his legacy which will always be remembered by his numerous well-wishers, friends and the Earth Science fraternity across the globe. We mourn the sad demise of the renowned Geologist, Professor Brian Frederick Windley, who left for eternal abode on March 06, 2025. Our sincere homage and humble gratitude to an iconic scholar!

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