

Welcome to Ruislip-by-the-sea

Did you know that the warm waters of a shallow sub-tropical sea once washed the shoreline at Ruislip? Admittedly, it was 56 million years ago, the world was a very different place and the evidence, which was only discovered in 2017, is up to 33m below the ground.

Investigations for the route of HS2 between Ruislip and Northolt were expected to find sand and gravel but instead found a black clay with the remains of vegetation, indicative of a forested swampy area close to the sea. Now called the Ruislip Bed, the clay is about 0.5-1.0m thick. Investigations at a similar depth nearby found sand and gravel that had been deposited in the sea.

At that time, Britain was a subtropical island and the south-east of England lay on the western edge of a sea that extended eastwards at least as far as Poland. There were no polar ice caps and sea level changes were caused by movements of the earth's tectonic plates. The Atlantic Ocean was opening up and India was moving northwards towards the bulk of Asia. This resulted in frequent changes in sea level and the position of the coast. Such changes were usually accompanied by reworking of sediments, which destroyed the evidence for previous shorelines. Finding this bed was therefore unexpected and revealed something that had not been known before.

The rocks beneath our feet reflect the multiple changes that have occurred during the earth's existence and our knowledge increases as investigations and research are undertaken. If you are interested in how the earth has developed to its present state, what creatures have lived here and how the rocks have been used to assist our lives, then there is a local society for you, the Harrow and Hillingdon Geological Society or HHGS.

Formed in 1973 by a group of enthusiasts who had met at evening classes, HHGS aims to advance public appreciation of geology. It does this in a variety of ways. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month when talks are given by invited speakers, specialists in their respective fields and often at the forefront of research to advance our knowledge. Field meetings led by experts to see rocks in the field may be one-day, a weekend or a full week. Town walks look at the stones that have been used in buildings. HHGS also puts on exhibitions of various aspects of geology along with specimens of different rocks and visits schools with a "hands-on-table" to introduce our children to the fascination of geology.

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