



From the left, Jim Craig, Raymond Casey, Scott, Mick, and Ray Milbourne at Raymonds 80th. Birthday

Our friend Jim

I began to write this little story late at night on Monday 24th. September 2001
The day I heard our friend Jim Craig had sadly passed away.

Mick Cuddeford

One Sunday afternoon during August 1976, while out with some friends collecting blackberries, my friend Dave Shepherd, also known as Dodgy Dave inquired whether I had ever collected fossils. I replied I had not. Being an ex Maidstone Grammar School boy, David had been on several natural history field trips with that illustrious school. My formal education at school in London and Maidstone had included, apart from gardening and a little of what was called 'Nature Study', three Fs, none of which included fossil collecting. Instead we were encouraged to pursue the delights of Football, Fighting and if allowed out, the occasional trip to Fords of Dagenham. However I had heard of these things called fossils, when earlier in life. I lived in the East End of London. Many a trip was made with my Mother, in those days, to the West End and on some very special occasions, I was introduced to the wonders of the Science and Natural History Museums at South Kensington. Also, I well remember being amazed by a very small ammonite a boy in my class offered me for sale one day. I had eagerly parted with a shiny sixpence for what I considered a real prize, especially as our form master told me that the object was between 150 and 65 million years old.

So, on that Sunday in 1976, Dodgy and myself left the blackberry pickers on the banks of the river Medway to scale the fence into Allington Quarry. We had gone but a couple of hundred yards across a field when a Land Rover screeched to a dusty halt at our side. Out jumped a large security man demanding, "What are you doing on this private property?"

"Fossil collecting!" I replied with confidence.

"You'll have to leave now," insisted the large security man, "You're trespassing, leave by the nearest exit now!"

We left immediately.

"We'll try somewhere different next week, if you want," said Dodgy, as we made our way out of the field. "The school took us to Folkestone once and also once to the Isle of Sheppey and I remember finding lots of fossils."

"Sounds good to me Dodg." I enthused.

Next weekend, off to Warden Point at first light, well nearly. What fun we had on that lovely slippery black mud, picking up bits of twig and stone that vaguely looked like they might have once been part of something alive. Falling over backwards every five minutes or so, hitting our heads on some rotten green coloured lump of rock. After what seemed hours of hunting, not a crab or shark tooth to be found so, we decided to head off to Folkestone and see if we could do any better there, at least we might be able to stay upright.

Even with the handicap of Dodgy's failing memory, we located The Warren and Copt Point cliff section at Folkestone in good time. Down to the beach, on all fours, scurrying over the shingle and amongst the rocks we quickly began to find, what we thought at the time, to be superb fossil specimens. Occasional pieces of curly things, which looked a little like the thing I had purchased for sixpence all those years earlier. Long thin pointed things by the dozen, nearly completely disintegrated fragments of what looked like cockles and winkles, bits of twig and stone that somewhat resembled the bits found at Sheppey earlier in the day. 'Great, there's not much to this fossil lark then.' I remember thinking at the time.

Some time later in the afternoon, standing below a low clay cliff, fairly close to the concrete path that takes you along the foreshore of East Wear Bay and onwards towards Dover, our attention was drawn towards a lone male figure moving slowly along the cliff in our direction. After each step he would stop and look intently at the clay, poke it with some sort of tool, remove something from the clay, examine it closely for a few seconds, before placing the object into a small plastic bag. He appeared to be about my height, a little heavier perhaps, wearing gold rimmed glasses, a waterproof top, chord trousers and green gum boots. He carried a small spade and I noticed, as he came up close to us, the rucksack slung across his shoulder appeared full of small plastic bags bulging with objects wrapped in tissue. With an obvious air of confidence he said

"Good afternoon, I'm Jim Craig." He then asked if we had had any luck that day.

I eagerly showed him some of the wonders I had found. He examined all most carefully and with a quiet exclamation of "Hm" handed them back to me.

"Had any luck yourself?" I found myself inquiring, feeling that I had immediately become part of some sort of an in-crowd.

"A few nice pieces, of course it's not so good this time of the year."

"No," I agreed knowingly, "We didn't have too much luck at Sheppey either this morning." Within seconds Dodgy and myself found ourselves showing this chap the meager selection of twigs and stones we had found earlier that day.

An even quieter "Hm" and the 'Chuckite' was passed back to us. He then proceeded to ask our names, inquire about where we came from, had we been collecting fossils for long, did we know this person and that person, had we read this book or that book. How it was such a shame that bed seven was not uncovered at beach level today, how the tides had left so much sand on the foreshore and all sorts of

stuff we hadn't got a clue about. All the while, gesticulating with his hands and moving his weight from one foot to the other. I remember at the time thinking, 'He's a bit busy this bloke, wants to know a lot, and what the devil is he talking about?'

"Well, see you again no doubt." he said eventually, and continued on his way, poking here and there with the tool and putting objects into the bag.

"Interesting bloke" said Dodgy.

"Yeah, uses a screwdriver." I replied.

What, of course I hadn't realized, but, would so in the future, was that Jim was beginning the process of checking us out. He was working out if we were new to the interest, students perhaps, people who might be trusted with some of the secrets of the Warren and not likely to do damage to a geological type section and, above all, would, like himself, come to have a love for Folkestone and its wonderful fossils. We set off home and made plans to return to Folkestone the following weekend, armed with our own spades screwdrivers, rucksacks, plastic bags and tissue, that was obviously the equipment required to become a successful fossil collector.

This person Jim had already begun to have some influence on my life, although, after this first, brief encounter, there was no way I could possibly envisage the future and the times we would have together. The places we would go, the wonderful finds we would make, the amount of knowledge we would both gain, the fun we would have in each others company, and the many new friends to be met, which soon would include his lovely wife Linda. After my old Mum had met Linda for the first time, she always referred to her as, 'That lovely natural young lady.' Just for the record, she thought Jim was lovely too, especially the day we took her to Folkestone to watch us dig for fossils and after some hours toil, Jim pulled out a most stunning ammonite. My Mum always remarked on how he had jumped out of the hole holding the beauty aloft and looked so happy and excited. As they used to say, 'Like he'd just won the pools.'

It was, in fact, two weeks later when we again found ourselves on the foreshore at Folkestone. Now armed with all our new equipment, which not only included a spade, screwdrivers, plastic bags, tissue, rucksacks and gum boots, oh and woolly hats, but brand new, lightweight shower proof suits. I well remember mine was a light blue, how professional we must have looked, how stupid also, bearing in mind it was Summertime.

We had arrived at Folkestone early in the morning for us, about 9am. as I remember. Walked right along the beach from Bakers Gap and settled in for some serious collecting at the small cliff section we had previously been investigating. Most of the clay at the top of the beach and in the cliff was a fairly light grey, lower down on the beach however, it was much darker. We had had no luck in the lighter clay but, the darker stuff seemed a bit more promising. In the dark clay at the top of the beach we began to find some really beautifully preserved fossils with lovely nacreous shells. Unfortunately the nacreous material was only on soft clay and it seemed impossible to remove a fossil without destroying it. (In more recent years I have managed to overcome such problems). While intent on trying to succeed in this dark clay, we realised that Jim had joined us.

"Been down long ?" he inquired, eyeing our little dig.

"Yes, got here sharp this morning, about half nine." I boasted, "How about you ?"

"Since first light." he replied nonchalantly.

"Oh, any luck ?" mumbled Dodgy, just about awake, we had had one or two glasses of Pernod the previous evening.

"A few nice ammonites." answered Jim. He then took something out of his jacket pocket to show us. I remember distinctly it came from his right hand pocket for, at that moment my life was to take a different direction, I was about to see an object that would make me want to find something as spectacular and beautiful and precious for myself as soon as possible.

The ammonite Jim held out was nearly 3" in diameter, very ornate, wonderfully preserved, in what I would come to know as pyrite. It glistened gold, its metallic preservation reflecting the sunlight. I can't remember what I said as I held it in my palm, probably something not printable here. I think at that time Jim warmed towards Dodgy and myself. He soon realised that we didn't want to know what the value of this amazing object was, only be told where we could find one for ourselves and to learn as much as possible about this fossil collecting business. I guess at that time in his life, Jim was wanting to pass on some of his hard earned knowledge. As it seemed, soon after this second meeting, we became friends and with great enthusiasm, Jim began the process of teaching me all he could. This involved meeting regularly, and collecting together. Providing me with huge amounts of information on books which would help me with identification and give me information about the stratigraphy at Folkestone and other sites, how to prepare specimens, preserve unstable specimens, as well as introducing me to the many people he had made friends with in the fossil world. His enthusiasm and energy always seemed inexhaustible. I so vividly remember, in those early days, our many trips to local clay and chalk exposures, hacking out all manner of super material. The many holes we dug side by side at Folkestone. Though I hasten to add, never in the Type Section. We would always dig in areas of slip or at beach level where the next tide would cover our excavations.

As my living, in those days, was earned in the building trade I was particularly good at digging, and so was able to teach Jim a thing or two about the noble art, after all he was only a 'Desk Waller'. Under

my guidance he too became a good digger and we spent many a Saturday or Sunday, or both, together digging out the beds where super fossils could be found. In this way, over the next few years, with Jim working away beside me and passing on his knowledge, my knowledge of the section and fossils to be found at Folkestone grew and grew. Often we would sit having a break, eating our sandwiches, looking out to sea, pondering what it might have all been like 100 million years previous. All the various creatures

going about their daily business, the ammonites, some actively hunting their prey, some just hanging about, waiting for lunch to arrive. The numerous bivalves and gastropods happily filtering, burrowing and grinding away. The sudden mass panic when a top predator was on the scene, hunting out the thin shelled ammonites. After a good days collecting, we would often both later admit to having dreamt of ammonites that night, pulling out wonderful golden specimens by the dozen or, if the dream was exceptional, we had been swimming in the sea with them. I still have those dreams sometimes.

I well remember when one day, Jim asked if Dodgy and myself would like to find some chalk ammonites. We couldn't wait for the next Saturday to arrive, Jim always used to say. "You've got to be first, especially at the coast in Winter." So, let me paint a picture for you.

It was early in January 1980. 6 am. in the morning, barely light and about five below freezing. Dodgy was still asleep on his feet and I think we were still both hung over from the previous nights intake of Pernod. Jim of course had been up hours, had already had a look along the Gault and was bristling with energy and expectation at what the day might bring. We had agreed to meet on the foreshore at the beginning to East Wear Bay, then walk loaded with the usual equipment, plus heavy hammers and chisels, towards Dover to the foreshore below Abbots Cliff, a couple of miles or so each way. Sounded fun, after all, we were all tough young men in those days. We set off in the direction of Dover, it was raining moderately heavily and blowing a bit from the North East. Half a mile or so later, it was really pouring it down and blowing hard from the North East. Now during my working life I had spent many rather unpleasant days in fields, along the side of country lanes and on muddy building sites in all kinds of rotten weather however, I doubt very few of those experiences came anywhere close to this particular fossil expedition. It was at times so uncomfortable that after a string of expletives from all involved, we at times just had to stand and laugh and wonder what the Devil we were doing there. But Jim, leaning into the driving, freezing rain, encouraged us on, promising it would all be well worth it in the end. And so it was, the weather cleared, it became a pleasant sunny, although very cold day, we were

first, although I don't believe we saw another soul all day. Best of all, as the tide went out, the *mantelli* zone appeared in all its glory with super fossils appearing everywhere. I remember that day as a really super day.

I could easily fill many more pages with similar stories of the dozens of trips to Sheppey, Broadstairs, and Dorset. The pits we visited in Sussex, Borough Green, Westerham, Blockley etc. etc. Each venue with its own special memories, still so fresh in my mind.

Sometime during 1984 Jim introduced me to Steve Friedrich, who at that time was a keen amateur collector. The three of us went out collecting on several occasions and Steve became a good friend. During August 1985 I went off with Steve to Watchet in Somerset, as many will know, a splendid location for early Jurassic fossils. I had been fairly unwell on and off for some time that year and the first night staying in digs in Watchet I suffered a massive heart attack, this resulted in my being rushed into hospital and intensive care. One guess as to who traveled down from Kent the next day to see how I was. Of course it was Jim.

Jim was one of the first people to join The Kent Geologist Group, which I joined soon afterwards. We joined The Medway Lapidary and Mineral Society together in 1977. Jim was a GA member and took great interest in the Annual Reunion. Around 1984 he introduced me to Ray Milbourne, author of several notable papers on the Gault clay and now one of my good friends. In more recent years, through Jim, I have got to know and become great friends with Dr. Raymond Casey, who so many people involved in the fossil world, know and respect as one of the great Geologists of our time, a world authority of the Gault and Lower Greensand, and a gentleman with an immense wealth of knowledge of Folkestone. Jim made dozens of friends and contacts in the Geological world and it was always his nature to introduce them to one another. Those I have spoken to of late, have all expressed their great sadness at his passing, and how important was the contribution he made throughout his long time involved with fossil collecting. He always approached the work in such a professional way, setting himself very high standards, and yet always retaining a good sense of fun and a willingness to share his knowledge.

His lovely wife Linda and children, Simon and Samantha must miss him tremendously. His many friends also miss him tremendously and think often of his family. I trust he is now at peace after suffering so bravely the cruel disease that ended his life. It was only in January this year, while in the midst of his treatment that he would ring me and try to encourage me down to Folkestone, proclaiming, the collecting was marvelous, best he'd seen for years. On one occasion that I visited Jim in the Medway hospital, he was sitting on the bed with various tubes dripping solutions into him, by his side his portable computer and a bunch of Folkestone ammonites. I hope Jim, we will one day, some how, be together again collecting fossils and perhaps, really be swimming with the ammonites.

Your friend Mick.

Kent Geologists' Group

The committee and all members of the KGG would like to take this opportunity to express, how saddened they were to hear that Jim Craig had lost the battle against his long illness. Jim was a founder member of the group, and was much respected for the high standards he achieved in his work in Palaeontology. His enthusiasm, willingness to help others and friendly demeanor will be greatly missed by us all. Everybody at the society wishes to extend their sincere sympathy to Jim's wife Linda, and children, Samantha and Simon.