



Alumnus Subject Graeme Eagles
Graduated Geology
Place of Work 1996
Position RHBNC
Senior Lecturer



Royal Holloway's department of Earth Sciences teaches 300 students on degree programmes and produces leading international research across the geosciences. It has strong collaborative links with the petroleum and environmental industries. Graeme has roles in both research and teaching in the department, as well as in student recruitment.

Great minds *go on to* great places

What attracted you to the College?

I chose RHBNC as offering the most suitable mix of course and lifestyle for me. I was very drawn to the fact that the campus is so close to both Windsor Great Park and to London. I felt this offered me the chance to enjoy something of both town and country in one place. The department immediately felt right to me with its informal and friendly atmosphere and the open door policy its staff operate in interacting with the students. Compared to some other places I visited, I really got the feeling that these were people who were committed to adding value to my education.

Were you involved in any clubs or societies?

Throughout my time I was a member of the New Lyell Society – the student geology society – which organised regular social and academic events that were a tremendous supplement to student life. The annual Lyell Day seminar was a particular highlight, with visiting speakers and in the evening the formal dinner and dance held in the Founders Picture Gallery. I was also a member of the Walking Club, which went to places like the Peak District on weekends. It was here that I first witnessed someone suddenly and unexpectedly disappear chest deep into a bed of sphagnum moss, a humorous hazard of life as a geologist.

What are your fondest memories of being a student?

My best memories are from the times I spent on fieldwork, which took us to destinations around the world. But RHBNC also took me to more local, but no less spectacular localities in the UK, including many on the south coast that have since become part of a world heritage site (the Jurassic Coast), which I still love to visit today. We also had the great privilege of visiting sites that I already knew from textbooks, like Hutton's Unconformity at Siccar Point. Being with like minded students in these settings, isolated from outside influences, and sometimes in difficult weather conditions, really cemented for me the feeling of being part of something worthwhile, something almost like being part of a new family. I have memories of many small moments in the field, like being asked to take measurements at a freezing cliff face for a friend, who reappeared ten minutes later looking much relieved – with a full hot water bottle tied around her middle. Another great moment was hearing about a student on an excursion who took two left boots into the field with him. A week later, the rest of the year group went on the same excursion, and the same student's housemate realised he had brought two right boots. The two of them had the same size and make of boots, and had picked up half a pair each.

What was life like at Royal Holloway?

It was relaxed and welcoming, and created exactly the environment that I needed to study effectively and with enjoyment. The staff were very helpful; my personal tutor inspired me to continue my studies as a PhD in Geophysics, and has remained a tremendous inspiration to me throughout my career. I'm hugely privileged to now have several other of my great influences from those times as my colleagues, where they continue to inspire me.

What would you say to someone thinking of studying here?

The work-life balance is hugely important, especially when you are paying, rather than being paid, to work. If you think the course might be right for you, then come and experience the college and the department for a day. You should feel right about the place in which you're going to live and study.

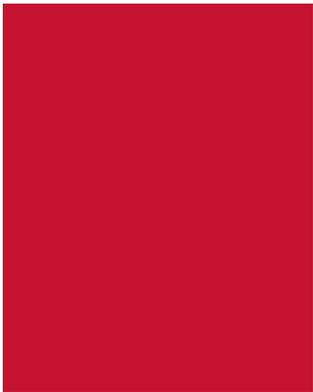
What were the greatest skills learned during your degree?

The degree brought me the ability to think across boundaries, to combine existing knowledge in new ways. This has been useful in my work on the interplay between plate tectonics and global climate change – two different fields of enquiry – over the last 50 million years. I also learned how



people with passion

“Royal Holloway and Earth Sciences gave me the best possible start I needed for a career in geoscientific research”



to build plausible conclusions on the basis of fragmentary data, and how the uncertainties in the data influence the reliability of those conclusions. This skill, in particular, is one that would be valuable in a range of employment settings outside of Earth Sciences.

Did you undertake a work placement whilst studying?

A member of staff in the department was building up a consultancy business and offered me work as a geological cartographer in the final two summers of my time at RHBNC. I feel that this played a part in improving my employability and I'm grateful that I had the chance to complete it. I think my studies have helped in my career, not just because I am teaching some of the material that I studied, but also because it gave me the best possible understanding of what it means to be a student geologist at Royal Holloway.

Please tell us about your current role.

Senior Lecturer. A mixture of teaching, administrative tasks, and original research. I teach in geophysics, plate tectonics, geodynamics, and fieldwork at Undergraduate and taught Masters levels. I supervise MSc and PhD students. I sit on the department's Research Committee and spend many hours meeting prospective students who

have applied via UCAS. My research focuses on plate tectonics and its very long term influence on global and regional climate, with a particular focus on Antarctica.

What are your favourite aspects of the job?

I like to see my teaching contribute to the development of true understanding, and not just the acquisition of knowledge, in the students I interact with. But I love the research part of my job - generating new ideas and knowledge for the first time. Travel is another highlight; I have been fortunate to visit cities or study rocks in every continent in undertaking and communicating my research. Perhaps best of all is when the two can be combined, in geological fieldwork. The chance to join a scientific research cruise to Antarctica on the German ice breaker Polarstern was perhaps the ultimate example of this for me.

What is the best project that you have been involved in recently?

A process-oriented model of the paleogeography of Antarctica 70 million years ago. Nobody really knows whether or not ice might have formed in Antarctica, and so have influenced global climate and sea level, 70 million years ago when atmospheric carbon dioxide levels were even higher than human activity is likely to push them in the

near future. What might happen in the future can be more fully understood if we have some idea of what happened under similar conditions in the past. This involves detailed computer modelling of ice accumulation and glacial motion, which in turn needs us to have a realistic idea of what the surface of Antarctica looked like – where its mountains and valleys were for example – before the present-day ice built up and changed everything.

Do you have any advice to give to students?

Work hard and enjoy it! Don't be afraid to challenge and if necessary change what has been presented to you as facts. Always keep an open mind and trust the observations you make for yourself more than any conclusion given to you by someone else. In short, be your own favourite teacher.

What does it mean to you to be an alumnus of Royal Holloway and to remain involved?

I am proud to have studied here. The college is a community of people that I would like to help widen. I read and enjoy Higher, the alumni magazine and continue to enjoy working in the place that gave me a great start to my career.

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