

Opening address by the President of the Geological Society of Jamaica - Ninth International Congress on Rudist Bivalves, Kingston Jamaica, 18-25 June, 2011.

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DISTINGUISHED members of the head table, delegates, specially invited guests and members of the audience, it is indeed my distinguished pleasure on behalf of the Geological Society of Jamaica to bid you welcome at the start of this the anticipated Ninth International Congress on Rudist Bivalves. For those of you who are not aware, these conferences are only convened once every three years and so as the lead organizer of this conference, the Geological Society of Jamaica feels very privileged to play host to this team of international and local experts in this field of study and we are excited to be able to show you some of the highlights of Jamaica's historical geological formations and the fossils they contain.

However, I must not be remiss in first introducing the topic of the conference properly (particularly for those of you in the audience who I know may not be aware) and to do this I will share with you my own curious experience. In 2005, I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in the rudist congress in Austin, Texas. On the way to the conference, in a more or less ordinary immigration line, a middle aged immigration officer looking at a young Jamaican presenting himself for entry into the United States. He looked somewhat half sternly and half curiously at me and asked "*What is a rudist?*" In a split second it occurred to me just how odd the name sounded and how wild the imagination can roam when one thinks hmmm '*rudist conference?*' So I laughed and quickly explained "*Yes you see rudists are a type of unusual fossil clam that went extinct along with the dinosaurs at the end of the Cretaceous period.*" Oh... but for so many of us in this room (myself included), rudists are so much more than that...for gathered in this room are some of the world's most brilliant minds when it comes to these particular beasts.

In my role as part-time philosopher, a somewhat appropriate quotation from Shakespeare comes to mind. It is from Hamlet and goes: "*What*

a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?"

So while not digressing into a philosophical debate about the true role and goal of man as a sentient being, I am sure we all can acknowledge that man delights himself in knowing. And so from an obscure group of fossils inhabiting the warm climes over 65 million years ago, we try to model what sea surface temperatures were like perhaps in the hope that they may one day be useful in modelling the present climate (the stability of which is under threat from our own devices). Or ..., we can learn how a rudist can island-hop its way across an ocean, or sit and debate why on Earth does *Titanosarcolites* have tubes. We can theorize how some rudists elevated themselves above the sea bottom in order to feed successfully and decrease their risk of burial or how they competed with each other for space. For the beauty and diversity of life we see today is in the Darwinian sense the product of the struggle for life.

Jamaica offers an excellent opportunity to study these particular creatures, especially within the timeframe of the late Maastrichtian stage just prior to the ultimate extinction of the group. Our distinguished history should also be highlighted here as Jamaica is the first place for which a geological map was produced in the Western Hemisphere (by Sir Henry de la Beche in 1827) and the presence of rudists on the island was long made known by the young geologist Lucas Barrett in the 1860s (and after whom the genus *Barrettia*, used as the logo for this Congress, was named). The timing of this conference being hosted in Jamaica is also auspicious because it coincides with the 40th anniversary of the publication of Lawrence Chubb's monograph in *Palaeontographica Americanca* in 1971. Lawrence Chubb was a founding member and

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the first President of the Geological Society of Jamaica. It also precedes the production of the volume on rudists in the *Treatise of Invertebrate Paleontology* published by the Geological Society of America and the University of Kansas Press.

And so with all this in mind, it is indeed our pleasure to welcome those of you who have travelled far and not so far, to the opening of what we anticipate will be a highly productive conference. I would like to express my own thanks

to our very dedicated team of organizers who have worked tirelessly to attend to the details of this Congress and of course to all our sponsors, some of whom are represented in this audience. For those of you from abroad, we look forward to sharing our warm culture, dialect and other curiosities with you and trust that you will come again. And for all of you, we hope this conference will significantly advance the study of these curious fossils. Thank you very much.
