

PréCiS

Summer 2022

Bringing Christian faith and science together

Issue no. 104

**Introducing our new
Membership Secretary
& Development Officer**

**Autumn Conference
Student Essay comp
CiS Local Groups**



**New Membership
Secretary
Colin Taylor**

**New Development Officer
Jack Alderson**



New Development Officer Jack Alderson

When and how did you become a Christian?

I became a Christian in my first year at university in December 2019. I went to university with no knowledge of Christianity or any interest to become a Christian. Although I was never against the idea of being Christian, I certainly didn't think it was for me! This all changed when the closest friend I made at university happened to be a Christian, causing me to question for the first time what I truly believed about the big questions in life. After saying no a few times, I finally caved in to go along to church and the experience I had was like nothing I had expected. I was so amazed at how genuinely everyone cared for each other and I just felt a deep sense of peace whilst being a part of that community. Fast-forward a few months later and I was baptised having not missed a single church service in the meantime. I can now look back on the past two and a half years with a deep sense of gratitude for how Jesus has become the centre of my life!

Which field of science interests you and why? (What sparked this interest?)

I have just graduated as a Biological Sciences student so it would only be apt to say biology. Although, the areas of biology that interest me most have certainly changed as I have aged. Growing up I was big animal lover, so I was always out in nature. Whilst I have gone on to specialise in other areas of biology, this love of nature was what originally pushed me to study Biology throughout my school career and eventually at university. Now, I find my main interests are in the world of microbiology, specifically studying microorganisms in the context of human infection. Within microbiology, I also have a passion for the human gut microbiota which ended up being the focus of my dissertation.



Jack Alderson

If you could chat with a scientist from the past, who would it be?

Considering my background as a nature-loving biologist, it would have to be a famous natural historian. David Attenborough is an obvious choice as he would have such a wealth of stories to tell, and it would be such an honour to meet him. I would also love to meet Steve Backshall as I grew up watching him on TV and being inspired by his work. In terms of famous scientists, he has probably had the largest influence on my life so it would be great to have a chat with him about his work.

I know I have picked two scientists who are very much not from the past but perhaps that shows my age! After all, it could also mean it's not too late to have a chance at chatting with them!

What challenges, if any, have you come across as a Christian and a Scientist?

I don't think I have had many challenges as a Christian scientist, although this could be because I have been a Christian for a relatively short time period. I suppose that some people do hear the fact that I am both a scientist and a Christian and instantly believe that those two are mutually exclusive. But because I can perhaps relate to previously having that belief, I can often understand where they are coming from and show them that this isn't the case. I often enjoy these sorts of conversations because it can totally shift (in a positive way!) how someone approaches the big questions relating to the Christian faith.

Perhaps other challenges actually come when a fellow believer is closed off to engaging in the crosstalk between science and faith. I think because I was a scientist before I was a Christian, I have had no problem with approaching the questions that even I am clueless on. However, sometimes for people in the opposite position I think it can be easier to shy away from a sense of uncertainty. I have found the best approach to these conversations is to have a combination of patience and grace, whilst also being prepared to share my beliefs when given the opportunity. I truly believe that we have a heavenly Father who provides us wisdom of discernment when we ask of it, and I hope to encourage this to any believers who do have big questions.

What do you do for fun? What are your interests outside of work?

I love to be out and about, whether that be enjoying time on nature walks or a day at the beach. I feel incredibly grateful living in a place like Exeter as there is both Dartmoor and the beautiful Devon beaches at my doorstep! I also enjoy playing sports and have been involved in several clubs in my time at university, ranging from long distance running to ultimate frisbee. Even when I am not playing, I love to watch sport, particularly football as a keen supporter of Tottenham.

When I am not outside, I will either be listening to music or cooking as these are probably my two favourite hobbies. A dream evening to me would be having some friends over for dinner, putting on a classic album, and serving them up something they've never had before!

Where is life taking you now?

Having just graduated from my bachelor's I am taking a break from academia to slow down and take time to deepen my relationship with God. I specifically have a hunger to discuss and answer the big questions surrounding faith and science, which I am excited to do as part of my role as Development Officer at Christians in Science. Alongside my role at CiS, I am interning as a youth worker at the same church I became a Christian at



Jack playing frisbee

during my time as a student here in Exeter. Through this internship I am excited to give back to the community that brought me to faith, and I look forward to bringing my passion for Jesus to the young persons who may be making their first steps towards their own faith.

In the slightly more distant future, I plan to return to academia to study a master's degree in Science Communication with the aim of pursuing a career in this industry.

How would you encourage other Christians to be interested in Science?

As humans we have a unique ability to wonder and for me this is where my passions for science comes from. This is not limited to Christians as we are all made in God's image - even before I was a Christian, I wondered at the beauty of the natural world which I now know to be perfectly made by our God! Therefore I would encourage Christians to dwell and wonder upon the things they are passionate about. Science tells us how things work and almost all things have some kind of scientific understanding to them. If you take my interest in cooking for example - there is science all the way from how an oven works to cook food to how our guts digest the food at a molecular level. When we stop to ponder how these things happen, it reminds us of the beautiful complexity of God's creation and it fills us with awe at how he has given us the gift of scientific understanding.

New Membership Secretary Colin Taylor

When and how did you become a Christian?

I became a Christian in 1976 during an event held in Stirling to celebrate an anniversary of the founding of the Moody Bible Institute. I was 18 at the time and considering going to university. I had been brought up in a Christian family (my father and his before him were Baptist ministers). Aside from the clear challenge made at the centennial event there were a number of triggers that led to my commitment, amongst them the observed behaviours of those around me, my recent reading of the Screwtape Letters and Surprised by Joy, a particular interest in Ecclesiastes which remains to this day, and my own joy in the created world, ranging from landscapes I was brought up amongst to the water fleas I was observing in a very fine local pond.

Which field of science interests you?

My first love was for that pond and what it held – but by seeming accident I came across a paperback copy of Sir Alister Hardy's New Naturalist volume 'The Open Sea – the world of plankton' when passing through Tyndrum towards an exceedingly wet holiday in Ardnamurchan. After reading that from cover to cover I was hooked – and I've maintained an interest in plankton and oceanography ever since.



Colin and his wife Linda

How long have you been involved with CiS?

As a very young Christian I travelled to Swansea to begin a degree course in marine biology. During 'freshers' week', a long way from home and not knowing another soul locally, I found an invitation to a lecture by Donald MacKay. His hour-long talk, without any indication of notes, was both transformative and affirming of the course I was set upon, as a Christian and as a scientist. I found out about what was then the Research Scientist Christian Fellowship and first joined it at that time but didn't become involved in a local group until working in London some 10 years later.

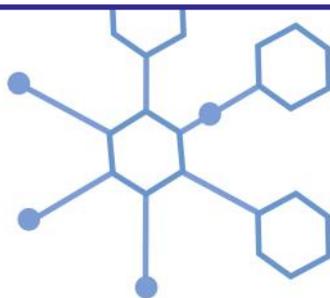
One of the joys of that time in London was meeting up with Sam Berry in the back rows of the Linnean and Zoological Societies, not that we were hecklers (though sometimes sorely tempted!). We both found ourselves invited to a series of workshops at Windsor Castle which led, eventually, to the Dean and Prince Phillip publishing 'Survival or extinction: a Christian attitude to the

Student Essay Competition 2022

Now open

For full details, terms and conditions go to:-
cis.org.uk/students

1st Prize – £250 2nd Prize – £125
3rd Prize – £50



environment'. Whilst there we kept close company with Sam's friend Jim Lovelock – and between us worked hard to put certain messages across. I still remember the gathering's indrawn breath when Sam dared to disagree with Prince Philip on something during one of the reporting sessions: the obvious expectation was that Sam's head was about to be removed from his shoulders but instead a lengthy conversation followed between the two of them with the rest watching on with a degree of awe.

How has your faith helped you in your career?

My faith, and my interest in the created order and how it works, have been at the core of my career throughout. An early understanding was that the better one knew how an ecological system worked, the more informed one was when making decisions about potential impacts. A technical interest in resilience, and thus functional ecology, and then risk assessment, method development and environmental management, were logical routes to follow. This way of

thinking, both as a Christian and as a scientist, has been crucially important in deciding what work to do, how to do it, and how to both communicate with people and manage those I've worked with.

Please tell us a little about your career.

After leaving Swansea I spent 10 years working within a small interdisciplinary estuary survey group at what was then called the Forth River Purification Board (now subsumed within SEPA). These were rich years, with lots of small boat and trawler work and practical experience of both water quality and oceanography, with my core effort being a development of the understanding of the functional ecology of the Forth estuary. I then spent a short spell as a pollution inspector before being recruited to the head office of the then Central Electricity Generation Board in London as a specialist in estuarine ecology. I had two roles there for the subsequent few years, the first as a liaison between the head office and the various CEGB research laboratories, and the second working with the

Department of Energy on their Generic Tidal Power programme, where I was involved in carrying out a peer review of development studies on the Severn, Mersey, and various other estuaries.

When the CEGB was broken up and partially privatised I found myself to be one of only two environmental scientists responsible for the civil nuclear stations, most of which were on the coast. I spent the subsequent 25 years in a variety of roles, sometimes on my own and sometimes managing a team, but always able to exercise my core expertise. Latterly, when working for British Energy and then Électricité de France, I was asked to develop and lead the marine and coastal studies programme to at first scope new nuclear development options in the UK, then support engineering design and environmental assessment at sites such as Hinkley Point, Sizewell and Bradwell. That programme needed to be strongly evidence based and involve the best possible science and frank communications with all concerned, whether the engineering teams in the UK or France, the various regulators, or members of the public. It was a joy to be involved with. That programme has continued successfully well beyond my retirement in 2018.

Most recently I've been working, seasonally, as an expedition guide and lecturer on small cruise ships operating in the Arctic and Southern Ocean. I most



Acting as a perimeter (bear) guard

certainly didn't expect to be relearning, in retirement, how to drive a Zodiac through ice, or how to shoot a rifle and be a bear guard, but it's been interesting.

Amongst the amazing things at work have been: where various studies come together as they are designed to and provide a solution that is needed; where something that's found that is unexpected but explains a previous conundrum; the elegance of complex systems; an encounter with a fine mind. And, unlike so many around us, we know who we can thank for such things.

What challenges, if any, have you come across as a Christian and a Scientist?

I have found a consistent conformity between the exercise of faith and practice of science throughout my career, perhaps as a common strain to both has been the need to apply good stewardship. I've been profoundly glad of books and essays written by past and present CiS or RSCF members. My greatest frustration has been where otherwise well-meaning church members and leaders have put unnecessary barriers to faith in place,

generally because they have missed the point that we are supposed to learn from the world that God has created for us.

What makes you go “WOW” outside of work?

I've been to some stunning places recently. Aesthetically, the smell of 200,000 penguins in a single colony is beyond description – and the same can be said if you stand downwind of a single elephant seal, wonderful beasts! Seeing a pair of ancient bowhead whale feeding just off an archaeological site on the shores of the NW Passage, from which the long-lost Thule people hunted the same animals, is probably the most interesting thing I've seen in recent years. One of the most beautiful places I've visited is the site of the Norse church at Hvalsey in SW Greenland – a reminder that God is good and his reach long.

King penguin colony South Georgia



My wife Linda and I have long loved paddling open canoes and we're just about to spend a week paddling the Fermanagh Loughs which we know and love so well.

Where is life taking you now?

We're in the process (perhaps a long process) of moving house from Gloucester to Inverness. We don't know what God has in store for us there, but it will be interesting to find out! And I'm grateful of this new opportunity to serve within CiS: this is an organisation I've been so glad of over the years and it's a privilege to be involved.

Save the Date

29th October

**CiS Autumn Conference
Celebrating 100th
anniversary of
Donald M. MacKay**

**Austin Court
80 Cambridge Street
Birmingham, BI 2NP**

**To encourage a time of fellowship
after the last 2 years,
there will also be other local
activities on the Friday and Sunday.**

LOCAL GROUP NEWS

BRISTOL

For information on Bristol events please contact Andrew Halestrap - ahalestrap@hotmail.com

DUNDEE

For more details on Dundee events please contact christiansinsciencedundee@gmail.com

EDINBURGH

For more information please email cisedinburgh3@gmail.com

HARROW

For details of future events in Harrow please contact Revd Lyndon North - revlnorth@aol.com

HUDDERSFIELD - students

For details please contact Omololu Fagunwa on fagunwaomololu@yahoo.com

IPSWICH

For more information about future events please contact Dr John Ling - jjling@btopenworld.com

IRELAND

For details please contact Dr Neville Cobbe - neville.cobbe@yahoo.co.uk for more information.

MANCHESTER

Please contact sec.cismanchester@yahoo.co.uk For details.

NORWICH

Please contact sfnorfolk@gmail.com for more details.

OXFORD

For more information, please contact Diana Briggs at diana.briggs@wolfson.oxon.org

SHEFFIELD

For more information please email rhoda.hawkins@sheffield.ac.uk

SOUTH WEST

For more information on events please email cissouthwest@gmail.com

SOUTHAMPTON

For information about the group please email Peter May - southampton@cis.org.uk

Details of all events are also available on the CiS App and at www.cis.org.uk events.

If you wish to start a Local Group in your area, please get in touch with our Development Officer, at do@cis.org.uk



ST ANDREWS

For information about the undergraduate group, please contact Dr Andrew Torrance (abt3@st-andrews.ac.uk).

For information about the postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

For information please contact Joy Perkins at joyeperkins@googlemail.com

TYNESIDE & NORTHUMBERLAND

For information on Newcastle events, please contact Bill Clegg at bill.clegg@ncl.ac.uk

WORCESTER

For more information please contact Jim Smith on jgsmith29@aol.com

YORK

For more information please email christiansinsciencyork788@gmail.com

Unfortunately due to increased spam emails we have made changes to our website.

Any listed email addresses now show as (at) rather than using the normal @ symbol.