

PARAMOUDRAS

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Flint bodies of this type were first described under the name Paramoudras by Dr. William Buckland, Chair of Geology in the University of Oxford, in 1816 (in the Transactions of the Geological Society), for specimens from the chalk of the north of Ireland. However, such flints were already known from the chalk of Norfolk and Dr Buckland mentioned a specimen, about two feet long and one foot in diameter, found in the chalk at Whittingham near Norwich, and in the Geological Society collection in London. In 1823 Richard Taylor recorded that numerous fine specimens of paramoudras were to be seen in the neighbourhood of Norwich, and were used for pots. Other authors record them being called 'Pot-stones' because of their central aperture and that they were often used in gardens as pots for plants.

These massive flint cylinders, open at both ends, attracted the attention of Sir Charles Lyell, who in 1825 visited a chalk quarry at Horstead, about six miles from Norwich. He found that these huge flints were arranged vertically. On breaking them open the internal chalk was found to be much harder than the ordinary chalk in the quarry, and did not crumble to pieces like it when exposed to winter's frost. Sir Charles Lyell reported his findings at the British Association meeting in 1834 (which were published in the Report for that meeting). Several enthusiastic local geologists took up Sir Charles Lyell's invitation to further study the 'pot-stones'. John Gunn presented two fine specimens from Horstead to the British Museum, and Mrs Gunn made a drawing of the pit in 1838, showing them in vertical rows and extending through horizontal bands of flint nodules (her sketch is reproduced on page 17 of 'Memorials of John Gunn' by Horace B. Woodward 1891). Robert Fitch of Norwich, a magistrate and antiquarian, discovered in paramoudras broken up at Horstead that the core of the chalk displayed a central green tube. He took Edward Charlesworth to Horstead, where they broke open more paramoudras. The tube varied in diameter from that of a quill to a finger; the wall of the tube was generally of a green colour and about as thick as the skin of an apple; it was filled with chalk which James Bowerbank found to consist of siliceous particles. Robert Fitch published his findings in the new series Magazine of Natural History in 1840 (which journal was owned by Edward Charlesworth).

William Buckland, in 1816, stated that he could trace the word Paramoudra to no authentic source. T. McKenny Hughes, Woodwardian Professor of Geology, University of Cambridge, wrote (Cambridge Antiquarian Society's Communications vol. XVIII, 1915) that an amusing exploration of the name Paramoudra was given to him by Charles Lyell. Dr Buckland observing some of them in a quarry in the north of Ireland asked the workman what they were called, when one of the men, willing to oblige Dr Buckland, invented a sonorous word on the spur of the moment - 'We call them paramoudras, Sir.' This went into Dr Buckland's notebook and was adopted as the name for these flints.

The Paramoudra Club (later the Geological Society of Norfolk) had its origins in the City of Norwich School in 1950, with a group of geology students. A paramoudra from the chalk pit at Costor St Edmund was the mascot of the Club.

In 1975 Richard Bromley, Max-Gottfried Schulz and Norman Beeko (in Biologiske Skrifter, Kgl. Danske Videns Selskab) attributed paramoudras to a deep-burrowing organism. Although paramoudras occur vertically in a depth of chalk that may represent many tens of thousands of years of sedimentation, their formation is related to the burrow (of a contemporary pogonophore-related animal) that runs down the centre of the cylinder.
