# T. N. George Medal Citation 2013. Professor Jenny Clack

Professor Jenny Clack was brought up near Manchester and took her first degree at the University of Newcastle where she took the Palaeontology option offered by Dr Alec Panchen. On graduating she pursued a career in museums by taking the Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies at Leicester University and took on a post at the Natural History Department of Birmingham City Museum before moving to the Museum Education Department. She was encouraged to take on part-time research in her spare time and so approached Alec Panchen who suggested that she could study the Carboniferous

crocodile-like amphibian *Pholiderpeton scutigerum*. She was able to borrow the type specimen from Bradford Museums and took three weeks study leave to prepare and research the material. On discovering that the material was more complete than previously thought, Alec suggested that there was a PhD in the study and applied for a grant.

In 1978, Jenny began her PhD project on *Pholiderpeton* after giving up her ‘safe’ job in the museum. After her first year of study, she had uncovered one of the most important features of this animal that would launch her future career. What she had found was a previously undiscovered small bone that turned out to be the stapes (a bone used for transmitting sound in the middle-ear). This and other discoveries helped to overturn long-held ideas on the evolution of the ear which had previously depended on the study of extant tetrapods.

Jenny applied for and was offered the position of Assistant Curator in the University Museum of Zoology at Cambridge in 1981. After finishing her PhD in 1984, she looked for something new to work on and found specimens of *Acanthostega* with *Ichthyostega* from the Devonian of Greenland in the Department of Earth Sciences at Cambridge. Jenny was keen to visit the site in Greenland from which the material had been collected and in eventually went on an expedition in 1987 spending six weeks pin-pointing the source locality and collecting more material. In 1998, she returned to Greenland with an all female research group funded by National Geographic and found more articulated specimens of *Ichthyostega*.

Working on early tetrapods has drawn Jenny to what has been called “Romer’s Gap” – a period recognised by the great vertebrate palaeontogist Alfred Romer of about 30 million years starting at the late-Devonian extinction event about 360 million years ago from which no tetrapod remains had been found. This left a gap in our understanding of how tetrapods developed onto land that Jenny has been helping to fill. In 2002, Jenny described *Pederpes finneyae*,a tetrapod form Dumbarton in the Hunterian Collection that came from this gap (~350 million years old). Jenny has also worked on tetrapods from Stan Wood’s excavations at East Kirkton (~335 million years old), naming *Kirktonecta* in 2011, and is working on tetrapod fossils from another Stan Wood excavation in the Borders near Duns (~350 million years old) – all from within “Romer’s Gap”.

Jenny has worked, and continues to research, extensively on early tetrapod evolution using specimens from around the world. She is the first woman in her field to become a Fellow of the Royal Society, appeared on the BBC 4 programme; *Beautiful Minds*, and was named the *Diva of the Devonian* by Nova beta.

The T. N. George Medal is awarded “for excellence in palaeontology and/or stratigraphy”. For her outstanding contribution to our understanding of the evolution of tetrapods, Professor Jenny Clack is a most worthy recipient of the award and I am pleased to call on our President Dr Brian Bell to make the award.

Neil Clark