



Charles Hutchison: Distinguished Geologist and Scholar



Charles Strachan Hutchison
B.Sc., Ph.D., F.I.M.M., F.G.S.
(17 April, 1933–18 October 2011)

Charles Hutchison was born in Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, on 17 April 1933 and passed away in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 18 October 2011 aged 78. Charles' Malaysian wife Ann pre-deceased him and he is survived by two children, Helene Mary Hutchison, and Timothy John Hutchison, and several grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Charles obtained a BSc degree in geology with first class honours from the University of Aberdeen in 1955. He then spent two years as an oilfield geologist with Apex (Trinidad) Oilfields in the West Indies after which he headed for Singapore via Liverpool by ship to take up an inaugural position as Lecturer in the Geology Department at the University of Malaya in Singapore. He later moved to the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in 1960 as Lecturer and then Associate Professor. He was instrumental in setting up the Geology Department at the Kuala Lumpur campus and the University of Malaya became his home base for the next fifty-one years. He obtained his PhD from the University of Malaya in 1966 and his thesis titled "Tectonic and petrological relations within three orogenic zones in Malaysia" reflected his developing interests in regional geology and tectonics. He was appointed Professor of Applied Geology in 1977 taking over from former colleague Professor Ken Hosking with whom he shared a deep interest in tin mineralization (which resulted in an edited book "*Geology of Tin Deposits*", 1988). He was appointed Department Head in 1978 and continued as Professor of Applied Geology until 1987 when he was compulsorily retired (all academics in Malaysia had to retire at age 55 in those days). Charles' value to the Geology Department and University of Malaya led to him being re-appointed as Professor of Applied Geology on a contract basis until late 1992.

During 1993–1994 Charles held a Visiting Professorship and Directorship of the Southeast Asian branch of the Earth Sciences and Resources Institute (ESRI) at the University of South Carolina, U.S.A. Following this he held positions as Visiting Professor at the University of Brunei (delivering an intensive course on Geology and Tectonics of Southeast Asia to M.Sc. students) and Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. He also held Visiting Professorships at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, and Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA. He was appointed Emeritus Professor in geology at the University of Malaya in August 2004, and continued serving as a visiting Senior Research Fellow from May 2009 until his death in October 2011.

Charles Hutchison was a scholar of international standing and widely acknowledged as a world-renowned expert on the regional geology, resources and tectonic evolution of SE Asia. He was a prolific writer and published five sole authored books, eight edited books/volumes, one hundred and thirty scientific papers and maps and countless conference papers and presentations including many invited keynote presentations.

Charles' initial interests were in granites, mineralization and tectonics in SE Asia but he always placed these studies in the wider context. His passion for compiling and reviewing regional geology led to his first edited book *Geology of the Malay Peninsula* (1973) co-edited with Derek Gobbett. His interests and expertise in geochemistry and petrography led to his *Laboratory Handbook of Petrographic Techniques* (1974), a book still being used and cited internationally almost forty years later. Charles Hutchison was quick to embrace the plate tectonic paradigm and this provided him with novel insights into the complex geology and resources of the region. His seminal paper on "Ophiolite in SE Asia" (*Geological Society of America Bulletin* 1975) laid the foundations for decades of study of the SE Asian region as a natural laboratory for the study of plate tectonics. He realized that the plate tectonic evolution of SE Asia underpinned the development of the rich natural resources of the region and that integration of on and off-shore geological information and data was vital for a greater understanding of regional geological evolution and exploration for SE Asian hydrocarbon and mineral resources. His novel integrated multidisciplinary approach to understanding regional geology influenced both his students and colleagues, including me when I joined the University of Malaya as a Lecturer in 1977.

Charles Hutchison also built on his early oil company experience by engaging with oil companies operating in SE Asia. In particular, he developed mutually beneficial arrangements for research collaboration between academia and industry, especially securing support for Honours student theses projects in Sabah and Sarawak (Borneo) sponsored by Sarawak Shell and Esso and more recently with the Malaysian National oil company PETRONAS. Charles also developed much positive engagement between

academia, mining companies and local geological surveys. Many of Charles' former students now hold senior positions in these companies and organisations, and in universities in Malaysia and overseas.

He will be remembered best, perhaps, for his comprehensive encyclopaedic books on the geology and tectonics of SE Asia, including *Geological Evolution of Southeast Asia*, Oxford University Press, 1989 (reprinted 1996 and 2005 by the Geological Society of Malaysia) which is an introduction for most geologists interested in or working on the geology of SE Asia. His deep interest in energy and mineral resources of the region resulted in his book *South-East Asian oil, gas, coal and mineral deposits* (Oxford University Press, 1996) which not only documents hydrocarbon and mineral deposits in the region but also discusses the genetic models for these in the context of regional tectonics.



Charles Hutchison, in full field uniform, pointing out load structures on the base of a Crocker Formation turbiditic sandstone in Sabah, 1978 (Photo: Ian Metcalfe).

Charles Hutchison, like his expatriate contemporaries at the University of Malaya Professor Neville Haile and Professor Peter Stauffer, spent much time engaging with the geology of Sabah and Sarawak, and in supervising honours and postgraduate students working on projects there. It was Charles who first introduced me to the geology of Borneo in the field in 1978, wearing his signature uniform of pumps and shorts and perusing outcrops whilst puffing on his pipe. His passion for greater understanding of the geology of Borneo led to his book *Geology of North-West Borneo:*

Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah (Elsevier, 2005), another classic review and a must have book on the shelf for all SE Asian geologists. His latest edited book, *Geology of Peninsular Malaysia* (2009), co-edited with D.N.K. Tan, published jointly by the University of Malaya and Geological Society of Malaysia, is a long overdue update of the 1973 *Geology of the Malay Peninsula* and incorporates decades of new data and presents up-to-date interpretations within a framework of modern geological concepts.

Apart from his teaching and research activities, Charles Hutchison contributed significantly to his discipline in many other ways. He was a Founding Member of the Geological Society of Malaysia and served as President, Committee Member, Editor and regular contributor to the Society's *Bulletin* and *Warta Geologi* publications. He was awarded Honorary Membership of the Society in 1986 for distinguished services to the geoscience community and for the promotion of interest in the geosciences in Malaysia. Charles Hutchison's international reputation and scholarly prowess led to him being elected a fellow of several learned societies including the Geological Society of London, the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy of London, the Mineralogical Society of America, and the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. In 1994, he was also awarded the Special Commendation Award of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in recognition of his outstanding contributions to geological research, regional synthesis, tectonic analysis and understanding of the hydrocarbon and mineral deposits of Southeast Asia. Charles' contributions to knowledge of SE Asian geology and resources were also recognised at national and international geopolitical levels and he was Co-coordinator of the SEATAR (Studies in East Asian Tectonics and Resources) Transects of the United Nations C.C.O.P. (Committee for Co-ordination of Joint Prospecting for Mineral Resources in Asian Offshore Areas) from 1988 to 1991. He was also advisor to the Malaysian Government on the geology and tectonics of the South China Sea and the margin of Sarawak and Sabah and played a leading role over many years in the Malaysian Continental Shelf Committee.

Charles Hutchison was a living encyclopaedia on the geology of SE Asia. He was always keen to share his enthusiasm for, and encourage people to be interested in, the geology of the region. I fondly recall the daily coffee/tea breaks at the Geology Department, University of Malaya and the many, sometimes heated, but always friendly debates on interpretations of the geology of SE Asia. Charles was not afraid to express his strong views about geology and on many other topics, but he would always listen and be persuaded by cogently presented arguments.

Charles was a true scholar and a gentleman!

Ian Metcalfe

May 2013