

Theory of the Earth

James Hutton



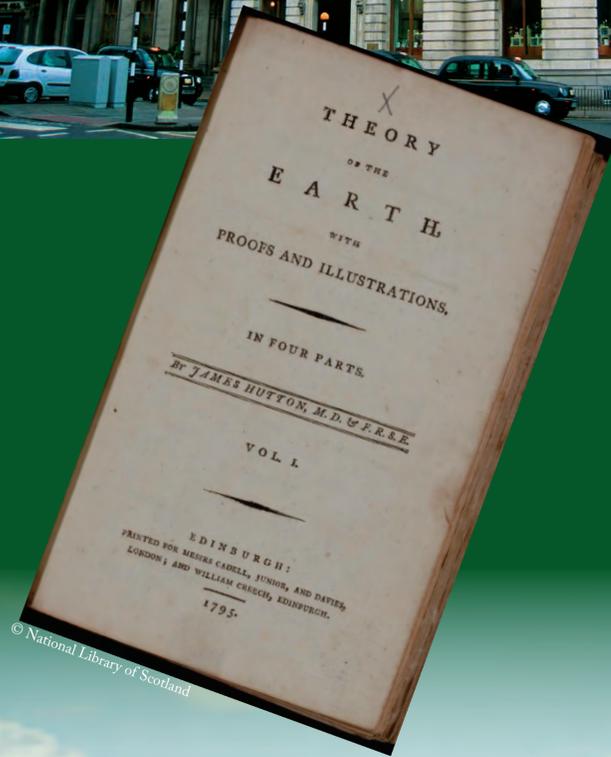
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James Hutton was a product of Edinburgh, and its educational institutions, High School and University, that were at the heart of the Scottish Enlightenment. He also possessed its intense intellectual curiosity about the physical world. As a result, an

early apprenticeship as a lawyer was abandoned in favour of medicine although here again his interests were less in the individual patient than in the physiological and biochemical system each represented. His ability to translate his knowledge of chemistry into commercial gain, together with the land holdings inherited from his family, gave him the financial independence to pursue other disciplines such as meteorology and geology. His research into local rock formations, particularly Salisbury Crags in Edinburgh, led him to formulate a new theory of the origins of the earth. This has become the foundation of subsequent studies and earned Hutton the title of the 'Father of Geology'. The new theory was first published in the *Papers of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* in 1785. (A further *Theory of Rain* that appeared in the same volume received less attention despite its continuing relevance to the climate of Scotland.) This initial publication was expanded and revised as *Theory of the Earth* and issued in two volumes in 1795. Despite the rewriting, *Theory of the Earth* remained a dense and relatively impenetrable work. It was not until his friend John Playfair produced *Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth* in 1802, five years after Hutton's death, that his ideas gained wide circulation and influence.



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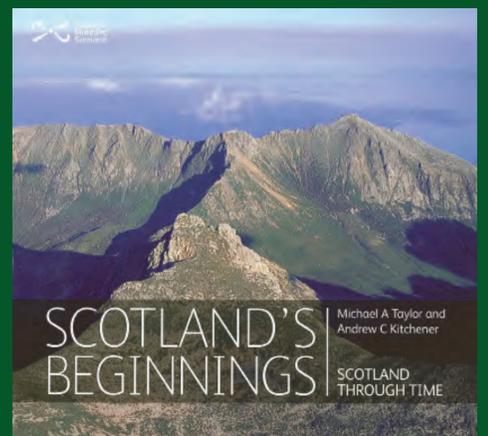
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