Preface

My fascination with fossils began long before I understood geology, evolution, or deep time. As a child growing up in Wales, I was drawn instinctively towards the ancient world. Dinosaurs captured my imagination first, as they do for many children, but it was fossils themselves that truly held my attention. There was something extraordinary about the idea that the stones beneath our feet could preserve the remains of worlds unimaginably older than our own. Rocks were no longer simply part of the landscape. They became fragments of vanished seas, forests, and creatures that had lived millions of years before any human being existed.

One fossil in particular shaped that fascination more than any other. When I was young, my mother acquired an ammonite fossil for me from a friend's husband who worked as a local miner. To anyone else it may have seemed like a small object, just a spiral preserved within stone, but to me it felt like holding another world in my hands. I remember studying the intricate chambers of the shell and trying to imagine the living animal that once drifted through ancient seas covering land that would eventually become Cymru. That fossil became one of my most treasured possessions, and even now I still keep it. It remains closely connected to my earliest sense of wonder about the ancient past.

Looking back, I realise that the fossil represented far more than a curiosity. It connected landscape, industry, and deep history together in a way I could not yet fully understand. The miner who passed it on had spent his life extracting the buried remains of ancient ecosystems from beneath Welsh ground, while the ammonite itself came from oceans that existed hundreds of millions of years before those coal forests ever formed. Even as a child, I could sense that Wales possessed layers of history extending far beyond castles, kings, or written memory. Beneath the valleys, mountains, and coastlines lay the remains of entire vanished worlds.

As I grew older, that curiosity expanded beyond dinosaurs alone. Fossils became a way of understanding how Cymru itself was formed. The rocks of Wales preserve one of the most remarkable records of life in Britain, from Cambrian seas filled with trilobites around St Davids and the Welsh borderlands, to Ordovician oceans inhabited by graptolites, to Carboniferous forests that would later become the South Wales Coalfield. Fossils reveal not only what lived here in the past, but also how changing environments helped create the landscapes that surround us today.

This book was written not simply to catalogue fossils, but to place them within the wider story of Cymru. Fossils are often presented as isolated specimens or scientific curiosities detached from place, yet in Wales they remain deeply connected to the landscape. A trilobite discovered in Cambrian rocks, a brachiopod preserved within Ordovician sediments, or a plant fossil recovered from Carboniferous strata are not merely objects. They are surviving fragments of ancient Welsh environments that can still be explored through the rocks and landscapes in which they were preserved.

A central idea runs throughout The Cymru Cycles: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. That principle extends beyond human history into the deep past. Long before kingdoms emerged, before languages developed, and before people arrived, the land that would become Wales was already home to countless forms of life. Fossils preserve that earlier story. They reveal ancient oceans, reefs, forests, and ecosystems that existed hundreds of millions of years before human memory began, providing a glimpse into the foundations upon which later landscapes and communities would develop.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. Scientific understanding continues to evolve as new discoveries are made and new evidence emerges. The interpretations presented here reflect current knowledge while seeking to provide an accessible and coherent

structure through which the fossil history of Wales can be explored and understood.

The ammonite I received as a child still sits among my possessions today. It remains one of the clearest reminders of why fossils matter. Not because they are rare objects, but because they allow us to glimpse the immense scale of Earth's history through something tangible and real. That single fossil opened the door to a lifelong fascination with the ancient worlds preserved beneath Wales.

It is my hope that this book helps others see Cymru in the same way: not only as a land of mountains, valleys, castles, industries, and communities, but also as a landscape built upon the remains of ancient seas, forests, and ecosystems stretching back hundreds of millions of years into deep time.

Nathan Williams
The Cymru Cycles