

Symbiosis 2026: Imagining Prehistories

University of Birmingham

November 2-4, 2026

Day 1 (November 2nd): Human prehistory

9:00 – 9:45: Coffee and registration

9:45 – 10:00: Opening remarks

Panel 1: Remnants and artefacts (10:00 – 11:30)

1. Niamh Lawlor (University of Birmingham): 'Green Roads and Stone Avenues: Expanding creative visions of the prehistoric landscape in the early twentieth century.'
2. Stella Basinyi (University of York): 'Prehistoric art and San identities'

Panel 2: Interpreting prehistory (11:30 – 13:00)

1. Jacob Blewett (University of Bristol): 'Politicised Prehistories: How Archaeologists can Counter the Deployment of Prehistoric Research by the Far Right'
2. Nick Fitzgerald (University of Bristol): 'Taking shots: the possibilities and probabilities of alcohol in British Prehistory'
3. Billie Gavurin (University of Birmingham): 'Gothic Prehistories: haunting, heredity, and humanity's deep past'

13:00 – 14:00: Lunch break

Panel 3: Displaying prehistory (14:00 – 15:30)

1. Jordan Kistler (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow): 'The Story of Us: Displaying Prehistoric Man in the Natural History Museum'
2. Abdul Busari (Oxford University Museum of Natural History): 'Muslim Experiences of Human Prehistory'

15:30 – 16:00 – Break

16:00 – 17:30 – Hannah Fluck (National Trust): keynote lecture on climate change and prehistoric heritage

18.00 – 19.00 – Will Tattersdill (University of Glasgow): public lecture on “Made Up Dinosaurs, Made Up World” – followed by discussion. Abstract below.

Day 2 (November 3rd): The interpretation of Earth history and heritage in museums and geoparks

9:55 – 10:00: Opening remarks

Panel 1: Keynotes: Interpretation in geoparks and museums – why and how? (10:00 – 11:30)

1. Janet Stott (Deputy Director & Head of Public Engagement, Oxford University Museums of Natural History)
2. Jack Matthews (Charnwood Forest Geopark and Avalonian Consulting)

Panel 2: Approaches to interpreting geology and heritage in geoparks (11:30 – 13:00)

1. Naomi Foster (North Pennines National Landscape/vice-chair, European Geoparks Network Education working group)
2. Elaine Hooton, (Written in Stone project, Open University)
3. Lubomír Štrba (Assistant Professor of Geoheritage & Geotourism, Technical University of Košice, Slovakia)
4. Mike Wilson (UNESCO Chair in Storytelling Education for Sustainability, Loughborough University)

13:00 – 14:00: Lunch break

Panel 3: Approaches to interpreting geology and heritage in museums (14:00 – 15:30)

1. Jon Clatworthy (Director, Lapworth Museum of Geology, University of Birmingham)
2. Liz Hide (Director, Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge)
3. Duncan Murdock (Oxford University Museum of Natural History and lead geologist on the 'Life As We Know It' redisplay project)

15:30 – 16:00 – Break

16:00 – 17.30 – Tours of museums and collections in the University of Birmingham

Day 3 (November 4th): Field excursions

Field excursion option A: Uley Long Barrow

Field excursion option B: Geoheritage Interpretation in Charnwood Forest Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark

Public Lecture Abstract: *Made Up Dinosaurs, Made Up World*, by Will Tattersdill

New discoveries, new interpretations, and new theories about the fossil record have steadily changed how we visualise Deep Time for the last two centuries. But these scientific processes haven't contributed to our pictures of the past alone or in a vacuum: reconstructing the past is always also an imaginative activity. This seems especially true in the high-profile case of dinosaurs, which can't be 'brought to life' without a combination of both scientific and fantastical ingenuity.

Dinosaurs aren't found only in labs and museums – we see them in novels, on TV, adorning the sides of buses, and on your children's t-shirts. What does it mean that some of the most remarkable scientific discoveries are such profoundly cultural objects? Among other things, it means that we have an opportunity to rethink one of the most instinctive divisions in our education system – the art-science divide. And it means that museums are the place to do it.

In this talk drawn from his recent book *The Social Dinosaur*, Will Tattersdill will discuss the history of dinosaurs in the imagination, arguing that Natural History Museums are a key venue for reconnecting the sciences and the arts.

Dr Will Tattersdill is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Fantasy Literature at the University of Glasgow, where he is co-director of the Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic. He is the author of *Science, Fiction, and the Fin-de-Siecle Periodical Press* (2016) and *The Social Dinosaur* (2026) as well as editor of H. G. Wells's *The Empire of the Ants and Other Stories* (2026).