



# Map: Poems After William Smith's Geological Map of 1815

*Stephen Boyce, Alison Brackenbury, James Brookes*

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The poems in this anthology celebrate a map, a man, and a science. The science is geology. The man is William Smith (1769 - 1839), civil engineer and geologist. The map is Smith's masterpiece: *A Delineation of the Strata of England and Wales, with part of Scotland*, the first geological map of an entire country, published in 1815.<sup>2</sup> As a working engineer, not a gentleman, Smith was unable to become a member of the newly formed Geological Society. His contribution to the new science of geology was initially dismissed by the Society, which set out to produce its own rival map. Coupled with some imprudent investments, Smith's venture culminated in a stretch in debtor's prison. By the time of his death in 1839, however, Smith's achievements had been recognised; in 1831 he was awarded the Geological Society's first Wollaston Medal in recognition of his work, and honoured by the Society's President, Adam Sedgwick, as 'the father of English geology'. To mark the two hundredth anniversary of its publication, I invited a number of poets to respond to the map, Smith's life, and his legacy. I was thrilled by the generosity and enthusiasm with which they embraced this invitation and the different routes their poems took. It was a pleasure to introduce many of them to the Geological Society's map up close and to listen to their astute and creative observations. There are poems in this anthology that tell the story of Smith's genius and his misfortune; poems about fossil hunting and map making; poems about the drive of the Industrial Revolution and our continuing reliance on fossil fuels. When most of us look at a map we look for home, and the same is true of many of these poets. But Smith's alien cartography of colour makes us see home in a radically different light, and so the poets, representing the geographical reach of Smith's map, confront the reader with new ways of seeing the landscape and history of Britain. Their poems illustrate not only the vibrancy and variety of contemporary poetry but also poetry's unique ability to take on uncharted territory with vision, to make connections and find relevance: the poems here make Smith's map anew in moving and surprising ways.

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