



## Museums Unleashed: using traditional and social media to communicate collections

Natural Sciences Collections  
Association Conference & AGM 2015



## Conference abstracts

### Using Media to Inspire Connections to the Natural World

*Wendy Darke, Head of BBC Natural History Unit*

As Head of the world-famous BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol, Wendy Darke is responsible for delivering over 150 hours of original Natural History content every year for audiences of all ages, both in the UK and around the globe.

This includes ground breaking new series such as *Life Story*, popular returning brands like *Springwatch*, children's favourite *Deadly 60*, Radio 4's *Tweet of the Day* and the newly-launched BBC Earth website, which offer great opportunities for audiences to be inspired to connect with their natural world.

Wendy will be sharing her insights into audience engagement through innovation in storytelling, technology and audience participation.

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### 50 shades of grey: communicating rocks

*Iain Stewart, Professor of Geosciences Communication, Plymouth University*

Geology, it seems, lies out of sight and out of mind. For that reason, geologists are increasingly being encouraged to communicate more broadly what they do and what they know. Yet how can we do that when, for most people, geology is about 'stones' and stones are 'boring'! It is a problem compounded by the fact that many of our most acute geo-issues are rooted in the unfamiliar realm of the deep subsurface.

This talk will use the experience of popularising geoscience for mainstream television to explore ways in which geologists can make our subject connect better with the dissonant public, and in doing so forge more effective strategies for meaningful public engagement.

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### BBC Earth social media case study: How millions engage with the natural world through social media

*Sari Zeidler, Social Media Marketing Manager, BBC.com*

Social media is changing how we experience the world. All it takes is a swipe of a screen and you can escape your London cubicle to watch the annual Polar Bear migration live from Manitoba, Canada. Or a snap of a ladybird in your back garden can bring a smile to someone 3 thousand miles away.

In the past 8 months, BBC Earth has built a devoted social following around a sense of wonder at our natural world. So what gets 3.8 million Facebook fans, 180k Twitter followers and 20k Instagram followers excited about planet Earth?

In this session I'll share my insights into how to develop a social strategy that will engage a passion community using amazing content, smart analytics and new technology.

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### **Fight at the Museum: Filming and Fees**

*Jack Ashby, Manager, Grant Museum of Zoology, UCL & Paolo Viscardi, Natural History Curator, Horniman Museum and Gardens*

Hiring out our spaces and staff to filming companies can be a lucrative income stream for museums, but are there times when we should offer these services for free?

In this session Paolo and Jack will try and convince you of their cases from opposing sides of the argument, to start a floor debate about the issue of when, if ever, we should let the cameras in for free.

*"This house believes that public museums should not charge for filming when the production content aligns with the museum's objectives."*

Bring your own experience and opinions and get involved in the debate.

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### **Mammoths in the media**

*Victoria Herridge, Natural History Museum*

The televised autopsy of an exceptionally preserved mammoth in November 2014 generated a huge amount of media interest, with a demand for expert input. This led to a whirlwind of activity for fossil elephant specialist Dr Tori Herridge of the NHM, who was involved in the autopsy.

Tori's resulting experiences on the media circuit provide a fantastic example of the unexpected requests, opportunities and expectations that go hand in hand with variety of elements of media coverage. Tori will share her experiences and pass on the lessons she learned through her experiences.

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### **Making specimens speak**

*Dr Henry Nicholls, Journalist, Author & Broadcaster*

Over the last decade, museums have shown an increasing appetite for using object biographies to take their collections to a wider audience. This approach is particularly powerful in the case of natural history specimens, many of which have rich stories to tell. Using examples, I reflect on different ways in which these narratives can be framed, communicating animal, human or institutional histories, geography, physiology, evolution or conservation. I also discuss how to place such stories in different media, including blogs, newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

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## **An Introduction to Social Media**

*Paolo Viscardi, Natural History Curator, Horniman Museum & Gardens*

The value of social media as a way of communicating about collections is becoming increasingly better recognised. Not only do social media platforms offer a chance for sharing images and stories with the public, they also encourage dialogue between museum professionals and specialist users of collections.

However, getting started on social media can be intimidating to the uninitiated, so we want to make sure everyone is up to speed on terminology associated with the social media, from follows and friends to hashtags and trends. We will also discuss some ideas about the best platform for different needs, hopefully with input from the social media savvy in the audience.

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## **From Number Sign to Hashtag - the Power of Social Media**

*Mar Dixon, Founder @MarDixon & @CultureThemes*

When the number sign (or hash symbol) was rebranded by Twitter as the hashtag, it gained a new and lasting function in society.

Mar Dixon will discuss the power of the hashtag, using examples from major engagement campaigns from CultureThemes including #AskACurator, #MuseumSelfie and #MuseumWeek. The breadth and impact of these sorts of social media events demonstrate that platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are definitely NOT just for teens and are now just as vital to museum business as emails became in the 1990s.

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## **Using Social media to engage students at the University of Reading Herbarium (RNG)**

*Dr Alastair Culham (Curator, RNG)*

The RNG herbarium is one of the few remaining highly active UK University herbaria. It provides resources for both teaching and research. For the past five years it has steadily developed social media in the form of blogs, Facebook and twitter activity that highlights the day to day operation of a herbarium. Key to this has been the student authored blogs which have raised the herbarium profile both outside the institution and, very importantly, within the institution. This has promoted a greater culture of engagement with the collection among our own students in Biological Sciences and beyond as well as providing a varied author style to the blogs.

Around 150k blog visits from over 190 ISO 3166 countries generate outreach far beyond conventional physical herbarium visits. This is augmented by Twitter campaigns such as #adventbotany and linked via Facebook to teaching and learning activity.

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## **Superstar specimens: natural sciences filming at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery**

*Isla Gladstone, Curator of Natural History & Bonnie Griffin, Biology Curator, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives*

Bristol is a centre for wildlife filmmaking, with the BBC's Natural History Unit and independent companies generating an estimated 25% of the sector's global output.

In this talk we give an overview of the different ways that the city's natural sciences collections have contributed to this field in recent years. We also share processes and procedures we have developed according to our experiences working with filmmakers at a practical level, including areas for future development.

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## **@TrowelBlazers & @TwilightBeasts – the benefits of joint blogging**

*Jan Freedman, Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery*

Blogs are a way of writing down short, digestible articles (or 'blog posts') which can reach a wide variety of people. They are generally informal, and more personal, than newsletters or journals: which makes the blog posts more readable. However, writing a blog does take time and commitment.

This talk takes you through two case studies of blogs which are jointly managed.

@TrowelBlazers shares and involves people from all over the world highlighting the awesome work of female geologists and archaeologists. Built upon the same model as @TrowelBlazers, @TwilightBeasts explores the lost world of ice age animals from bats to mammoths. Both were developed virtually through making contacts on Twitter - without meeting in real life!

With a brief background to these successful case studies, we will highlight the benefits of joint blogging and present a model that can be used with realistic advice.

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## **@OisinTheDeer: collections and natural science engagement through Twitter**

*Dr Jon Radley, Curator of Natural Sciences, Heritage & Culture Warwickshire*

An Irish giant deer skeleton in the Market Hall Museum, Warwick, has nearly 3500 followers on Twitter. 'Oisin' (pronounced 'O'sheen') was chosen as the museum's mouthpiece as he's a popular exhibit, and looks out over the Market Place which hosts community events. He also represents the broader interests of our parent organisation, Heritage & Culture Warwickshire.

Oisin tweets about behind-the-scenes work, events, and museum-related media items. By giving Oisin a voice, we have developed his personality and opened dialogues with other tweeters that might have been otherwise impossible. This is undoubtedly a key to his award-winning success. Future plans for the Market Hall Museum involve cross-disciplinary themes and displays. Within this context @OisinTheDeer will be integral to online/social media resources that will maintain our tradition of subject-specific provision.

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## **Reconnecting the contents of the Geological Museum (South Kensington, 1935 - 1985) with its users.**

*Mike Howe & Simon Harris, National Geological Repository, British Geological Survey.*

The Museum of Practical Geology (Jermyn Street, 1851-1935) exhibited most of the British Geological Survey's specimen collection and published a number of guides and instructional catalogues for students and for the public. With the move to the Geological Museum and then to Nottingham (Keyworth, 1985 onwards) most items were consigned to drawers. The internet has provided the means to reconnect these collections with their users.

During the past five years, BGS has made high resolution digital images of various collections available, including building stones and 4000 early twentieth century glass plates of the Kidston palaeobotanical collection. 135,000 rock thin sections<sup>1</sup> have been added since 2013, and an associated site includes high resolution images and stereo-anaglyphs of 17,500 type British macrofossils<sup>2</sup>. It also includes 2000 3d digital models, enabling users worldwide to print and experience 3d replicas of museum collections.

*GeoIndex*, a GIS (Geographical Information System) web-interface, allows the user to visualize numerous collections at once, spotting associations that might otherwise have been missed and providing a more versatile connection than strolling around the galleries a century ago.

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## **Handle with Care: Bringing museum egg collections to life**

*Edward Cole, PhD candidate, University of Glasgow*

Egg collections form a significant part of many natural history museum collections. However, because of the social stigma attached to egg-collecting today as a wildlife crime, many museums are uneasy about publicising and displaying their egg collections, despite the fact that it is perfectly legal for them to do so. My PhD research project is titled 'Handle with care: developing creative strategies for "difficult" natural history museum collections'. A partnership between Glasgow Museums and the University of Glasgow, it seeks to develop new, experimental strategies to exhibit eggs publically, whilst at the same time acknowledging the problematic ethical issues that delimit the practice of egg-collecting.

This paper discusses the potential use of archival information and stories about specific egg-collectors, their geographical journeys, and their connections to the wider historical egg-collecting community, to bring the eggs to light and to life using a variety of different media.

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## **Leicestershire Fashion in Detail – Using social media to engage new audiences with museum collections**

*Lucia Masundire, Project Manager, Leicestershire County Council*

Leicestershire Fashion in Detail is a 'virtual exhibition', curated by a Guest Curator, of close up images of objects from the Leicestershire County Council Costume Collection. It was specifically created to be published on social media and can be viewed at [fashionindetail.tumblr.com](http://fashionindetail.tumblr.com)

The presentation will look at how we used the Tumblr platform to encourage new audiences to engage with our collections. We will draw on our learning and show how this way of engagement can feed into your overall social media strategy.

Leicestershire Fashion in Detail is part of Click; Connect; Curate: Create an ACE funded R&D programme, exploring different ways to make the council's diverse collections accessible through digital means. While we hold extensive Natural Life collections, these were not used in the pilot projects. However, we feel this presentation could provide inspiration and ideas for similar projects to engage new audiences with Natural Science collections.

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### **Objects Meet World: Using Tumblr to Bring Collections to New Audiences**

*Rachel Jennings, Documentation and Collections Assistant, Horniman Museum & Gardens*

Social media have become very important in engaging audiences with the activities of museums. They can also be used to engage audiences with our collections. Tumblr is a microblogging site that can accommodate text, images, video, and audio content. It provides a versatile platform for museums wanting to share a range of digital content in an informal manner.

The Horniman began using Tumblr in 2012. Our page, *In-The-Horniman*, is administered by a group of non-curatorial collections staff. We aim to share our enthusiasm for the collections with our followers, and try to engage them through interactive features. The page has been very successful, gaining over 35,000 followers and winning the Best Social Media category at the 2014 Best of the Web awards.

This presentation will explain why the platform was chosen, how it is utilised by the Horniman, and some tips for other museums considering it as a blogging platform.

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### **Using Social Media to Highlight and Promote the Natural History Collections at Amgueddfa Cymru**

*Kate Mortimer, Senior Curator; Harriet Wood, Collections Manager; & Jennifer Gallichan, Curatorial Assistant, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales*

The Natural Sciences Department at Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales has been using social media to highlight its collections and research since 2011. Since then we have been growing our presence on-line using Twitter, Facebook, Storify, blog pages and Flickr. Although relative newcomers to social media, we have a steadily increasing following and we are adapting the ways in which we think and work to increase and raise awareness of our collections.

We have successfully inter-connected information across different social media platforms but also to more traditional media sources such as the museum's web-pages, on-line databases and catalogues. We have found that effective monitoring of our outputs has enabled us to streamline our efforts, improve efficiency, and produce more successful products.

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## Using Social Media as part of a Curatorial Traineeship

*Adam Peel, Glenn Roadley & Lukas Large, Skills for the Future Natural Science Curatorial trainees 2014-2015, The Manchester Museum, Leeds Museum Discovery Centre & Birmingham Museum Trust*

Over the past year, three HLF-funded Natural Science Curatorial Trainees have been working at various museums across the country to develop the skills and experience vital to finding employment in the museum sector – blogging and tweeting along the way.

Social media is a useful tool for making connections with other museum professionals, learning more about the museum sector and can even form a digital portfolio. Adam, Glenn and Lukas will discuss their use of various forms of social media during their traineeship, how it has benefitted them and how they will continue to use it during their career.

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## Social Media Challenge - “This museum is disgusting, why did you kill these animals?”

*Mark Carnall, Curator, Grant Museum of Zoology, UCL*

Difficult questions, misunderstandings and just plain lies.

Using real examples suggested by the NatSCA membership, this workshop will explore how to deal with *those* tweets and blog comments that might have you sweating at the keyboard deliberating over whether or how to reply.

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## Poster abstracts

### **The Discovery Collections: Cataloguing without a Curator.**

*Dr Tammy Horton, National Oceanography Centre, University of Southampton*

The Discovery Collections ([noc.ac.uk/data/discovery-collections](http://noc.ac.uk/data/discovery-collections)) are an internationally important historical collection of deep-sea marine invertebrate and fish specimens. The first samples were collected in the Southern Ocean by *RRS Discovery*, the ship used by Captain Robert Falcon Scott for his first Antarctic expedition in 1901. The collections are now split, with early material collected up to 1975, at the NHM London and material collected since then housed in a climate controlled warehouse in the grounds of the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton (NOC).

This poster details the process of curation and cataloguing of an important large collection of deep-sea samples known as 'The ECOMAR collection' (a 4-year project studying the fauna of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge; [oceanlab.abdn.ac.uk/ecomar/index.php](http://oceanlab.abdn.ac.uk/ecomar/index.php)) which comprises >1300 lots. The cataloguing was supported in part by the NatSCA Bill Petit Memorial Fund.

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### **Endangered Specimens and Endangered Skills: Online Training Video**

*Amalia Lempriere, Emmy Bocaege, Martyn Cooke & Samuel J. M. Alberti, The Royal College of Surgeons of England*

Due to the decline in the use of human and comparative anatomy collections towards the end of the last century, these specimen collections are now under serious threat. With renewed interest in object based learning, these collections provide great potential for the future. However there are fewer remaining collections and even fewer staff with the relevant expertise to prepare and maintain these collections.

The Royal College of Surgeons of England launched a three year initiative to train two conservators with the relevant skills. A key part of the scheme was to provide training courses for museum staff at other institutions who are responsible for fluid preserved specimens. In order to reach a wider audience, a training video has been produced, which looks at key elements of the conservation process. This poster outlines the making of the video and its accompanying handbook.