



NEWSLETTER

January 1994

Vol 6 No. 3

Welcome to another BCG Newsletter. This issue contains another mixture of the fascinating, the essential, the tragic and the downright farcical. As claimed by another, less august, publication "All human life is there". I would like to thank all those members whose contributions have enabled another full length issue to be assembled. Contributions are of course still welcome from anyone who has a snippet for general consumption and I would particularly encourage the new recruits to our curatorial ranks to contribute something. Please remember that this is not the Royal Society and all that is required is that your note should be of interest to other members. It does not (yet) have to be extensively researched, refereed and packed full of esoteric references. The one plea I would make (again) is that for anything other than a short note contributors send their piece on disk, preferably using Wordperfect 5.1, as this makes assembling an issue so much easier. Please note that the list of back issues of the newsletter as promised in the last issue will now be included in the next along with a list of the specialist publications held by BCG.

By the way, just to continue the pessimistic theme of recent editorials, ASC Newsletter for October 1993 includes notes on a paper given at an ICOM meeting at which details of a fire at the Saskatchewan Natural History Museum in Regina. Self ignition of polyurethane foam during the construction of an exhibit was blamed for the fire which proved difficult to pinpoint as parts of the security system had been disabled during the improvement works. All specimens nearby were coated with a thick, sticky soot. The motto is of course to have a disaster plan, never to leave buildings unpatrolled during building works, and to have smoke containment measures built into any new planning or upgradings for buildings.

BEETLE DOWN LEAFLET - UPDATE

BCG's stock of Beetle Down leaflets is now nearly exhausted and this is perhaps just as well considering the number of changes which apply to the address list. There are plans for a re-print of the leaflet and these can only go ahead after a total revision of the list.

To refresh your memories the list is included here with some revisions added for NW England and Scotland. PLEASE CAN YOU CHECK THE FOLLOWING DETAILS:-

1. That you and your museum are included.
2. That the address and telephone number are current.
3. That you have an * if you qualify for one.
4. Any other museums that you know about are not left out. (I do not mind how many bits of duplicated information I receive so long as I do receive it.)

Please send your replies to:-

Stephen Moran
Inverness Museum and Art Gallery
Castle Wynd
INVERNESS IV2 3ED
(Tel: 0463 237114)

by 30 January 1994

All of these museums provide a biological (natural history) service, but only those marked * employ a qualified biology curator:

SCOTLAND

* **Aberdeen University Museum,**
Dept of Zoology, Tillydrone Ave, Aberdeen AB9 2TN.
Tel: 0224-272849

* **Dundee Museum & Art Gallery**,
Albert Square, Dundee, DD1 1DA.
Tel: 0382 23141

* **Elgin Museum**,
1 High Street, Elgin, Moray, IV30 1EQ
Tel: 0343 543675

* **Falconer Museum**,
Tolbooth Street, Forres, Moray IV36 0PH.
Tel: 0309-73701

* **Greenock, McLean Art Gallery & Museum**,
15 Kelly Street, Greenock, Strathclyde, PA16 8JX
Tel: 0475 23741

* **Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum**,
Kelvingrove, Glasgow G3 8AG. Tel: 041-3573929

* **Hawick Museum**,
Wilton Lodge Park, Hawick, TD9 7JL
Tel: 0450 73457

* **Hunterian Museum**,
University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ.
Tel: 041-339 8855 ext.221

* **Inverness Museum & Art Gallery**,
Castle Wynd, Inverness IV2 3ED.
Tel: 0463 237114

(Kilmarnock) **Dick Institute**,
Elmbank Avenue, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire KA1 3BU.
Tel: 0563 26401

* **Montrose Museum & Art Gallery**,
Panmure Place, Montrose, Angus DD10 8HE.
Tel: 0674 73232

* **Paisley Museum & Art Galleries**,
High Street, Paisley PA1 2BA.
Tel: 041-889 3151

* **Perth Museum & Art Gallery**,
George Street, Perth. Tel: 0738 32488

* **Royal Museum of Scotland**,
Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF.
Tel: 031-225 7534

* **Shetland Museum**,
Lower Hillhead, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0EL.
Tel: 0595 5057

Stromness Museum,
52 Alfred Street, Stromness, Orkney KW16 3DF.
Tel: 0856 850025

* **Wick (Highland Region/Curator North)**
Bruce Buildings, Sinclair Terrace, Wick, KW1 5AB
Tel: 0955 3761 ext.245

WALES

* **Brecknock Museum**,
Captains Walk, Brecon, Powys LD3 7DW.
Tel: 0874 4121

* **National Museum of Wales**,
Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 3NP.
Tel: 0222 397951

NORTHERN IRELAND

* **Ulster Museum**,
Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB.
Tel: 0232-668251-5

ISLE OF MAN

* **Manx Museum**,
Douglas, Isle of Man. Tel: 0624 75522/25125

NORTH AND NORTH-WEST ENGLAND

* **Bolton Museum & Art Gallery**,
Le Mans Crescent, Bolton, Lancs BL1 1SE.
Tel: 0204 22311 ext. 2211/2197

* **Burnley: Towneley Hall Museum**,
Burnley, Lancs BB11 3RQ. Tel: 0282 424213

* **Carlisle Museum & Art Gallery**,
Tullie House, Castle Street, Carlisle CA3 8TP.
Tel: 0228 34781

* **Chester: Grosvenor Museum**,
27 Grosvenor Street, Chester CH1 2DD.
Tel: 0244 40144 ext. 2259

* **Clitheroe Castle Museum**
Castle Hill, Clitheroe, BB7 1BA
Tel: 0200 24635

* **Fleetwood Museum**
Queen's Terrace, Fleetwood, FY7 6BT
Tel: 0253 876621

* **Hancock Museum**
The University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 4PT.
Tel: 091-222-7418

* **Hartlepool: Gray Art Gallery & Museum**,
Clarence Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland.

* **Kendal Museum**,
Station Road, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 6BT.
Tel: 0539 21374

* **Liverpool Museum**,
William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN.
Tel: 051-207 0001/5451

* **Manchester Museum**, Univ. of Manchester,
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL.
Tel: 061-275 2634

Middlesbrough: Dorman Museum,
Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough, Cleveland.
Tel: 0642 813781

* **Oldham Local Interest Museum**
Graves Street, Oldham
Tel: 061 678 4657

* **Tyne and Wear Museum Service**,
Sunderland Museum & Art Gallery,
Borough Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear.
Tel: 091-514 1235 ext. 155

South Shields Museum & Art Gallery,
Ocean Road, South Shields, Tyne and Wear.
Tel: 091-4568740

YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE

* **Bradford Museums: Cartwright Hall**,
Lister Park, Bradford BD9 4NS.
Tel: 0274 493313

* **Cliffe Castle Museum**,
Spring Gardens Lane, Keighley BD20 6LH.
Tel: 0535 64184

* **Doncaster Museum & Art Gallery**,
Chequer Road, Doncaster DN1 2AE.
Tel: 0302 734287

* **Huddersfield: Tolson Mem. Museum**,
Ravensknowle Park, Huddersfield HD5 8DJ.
Tel: 0484-541455

Kingston-upon-Hull
City Museums & Art Galleries,
Town Docks Museum, Queen Victoria Square,
Kingston-upon-Hull HU1 3DX. Tel: 0482 222737

- * **Leeds City Museum,**
Calverley Street, Leeds LS1 3AA.
Tel: 0532 462632
- * **Rotherham: Clifton Park Museum,**
Rotherham S65 2AA. Tel: 0709 382121
- * **Scarborough:**
Woodend Museum of Natural History,
The Crescent, Scarborough YO11 2PW.
Tel: 0723 369151
- * **Scunthorpe Boro' Museum & Art Gallery,**
Oswald Rd., Scunthorpe, S.Humberside DN157BD.
Tel: 0724 843533
- * **Sheffield City Museum,**
Weston Park, Sheffield S10 2TP.
Tel: 0742 768588
- * **Yorkshire Museum,**
Museum Gardens, York YO1 2DR.
Tel: 0904 29745

MIDLANDS

- * **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery,**
Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3DH.
Tel: 021-235 2834
- * **Derby Museums & Art Gallery,**
The Strand, Derby DE1 1BS.
Tel: 0332 31111 ext. 782
- * **Coventry: Herbert Art Gallery & Museum,**
Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5QP.
Tel: 0203 832374
- * **Hereford City Museum,**
Broad St., Hereford HR4 9AU.
Tel: 0432 268121 ext. 207/334
- * **Leicestershire Museum Service:**
Leicestershire Museum & Art Gallery,
New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TD.
Tel 0533 554100
- * **Lincoln City museum:**
Broadgate, Lincoln LN2 1HQ.
Tel: 0522 30401
- Melton Carnegie Museum,**
Thorpe End, Melton Mowbray.
Tel:0664 69946
- Rutland County Museum,**
Catmos Street, Oakham, Rutland. Tel:0572 3654
- * **Nottingham Nat. History Museum,**
Wollaton Hall, Wollaton Park, Nottingham NG8 2AE
Tel: 0602 281333/281130
- * **Shropshire Museum Service:**
Ludlow (Buttercross) Museum,
Old Street, Ludlow. Tel: 0584 3857
- * **Stoke-on-Trent City Museum & Art Gallery**
Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 3DW. Tel: 0782 202173
- * **Warwickshire Museum,**
Market Place, Warwick CV34 3SA.
Tel: 0926 410410 ext. 2500
- * **Worcester City Museum & Art Gallery,**
Foregate Street, Worcester WR1 1DT.
Tel: 0905 25371

EAST-CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EAST ENGLAND

- * **Bedford Museum,**
Castle Lane, Bedford MK40 3XD.
Tel: 0234-53323/54954

- * **British Museum (Natural History),**
Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD.
Tel: 01-938 9123
- * **Brighton: Booth Museum of Natural History**
194 Dyke Road, Brighton BN1 5AA.
Tel: 0273 552586/603005 ext. 64
- * **Buckinghamshire Museum,**
Church Street, Aylesbury, Bucks. HP20 2QP.
Tel: 0296 82158/88849
- * **Cambridge Univ. Museum of Zoology,**
Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EJ.
Tel: 0223 358717
- * **Canterbury City Museum,**
High Street, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2JE.
Tel: 0227 452747
- * **Chelmsford Museum,**
Oaklands Pk., Moulsham St., Chelmsford CM2 9AQ.
Tel: 0245 260614
- * **Colchester & Essex Museum,**
14 Ryegate Road, Colchester, Essex CO1 1YG.
Tel: 0206 712487
- * **Dover Museum,**
Ladywell, Dover, Kent CT16 1DQ.
Tel: 0304 201066
- Gloucester City Museum,**
Brunswick Road, Gloucester GL1 1HP.
Tel: 0452 24131
- * **Hampshire Museum Service:**
Alton Curtis Museum,
High Street, Alton, Hants. GU34 1BA
Tel: 0420 82802
- Andover Museum,**
Church Close, Andover SP10 1DP. Tel: 0264 66283
- Basingstoke: Willis Museum,**
Old Town Hall, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 1QD.
Tel: 0256 465902
- Christchurch: Red House Museum,**
Quay Road, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 1BU.
Tel: 0202 482860
- Haslemere Educational Museum,**
High St., Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2LA.
Tel: 0428 2112
- Havant Museum,**
East Street, Havant, Hants PO9 1BS.
Tel: 0705 451155
- * **Hertford Museum,**
18 Bull Plain, Hertford, Herts SG14 1DT.
Tel: 0992 52686
- * **Horniman Museum & Library,**
London Road, Forest Hill, London SE23 3PQ.
Tel: 01-669 1872/2339/4911
- * **Ipswich Museum,**
High Street, Ipswich IP1 3QH.
Tel: 0473 213761/2
- * **Luton Museum & Art Gallery,**
Wardown Park, Luton LU2 7HA.
Tel: 0582 36941/36942
- * **North Hertfordshire Museums,**
Old Fire Stn., High St., Baldock SG7 6AR.
Tel: 0462 894352
- * **Norfolk Museum Service:**
Castle Museum,
Norwich, Norfolk NR1 3JU.
Tel: 0603 611277 ext. 279

Cromer Museum,
East Cottages, Tucker St., Cromer, Norfolk.
Tel: 0263 513543

* **Lynn Museum,**
Market Street, Kings Lynn, Norfolk.
Tel: 0553 775001

* **Maidstone Museum & Art Gallery,**
St. Faith's Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1LH.
Tel: 0622 54497

* **Oxford University Museum,**
Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW. Tel: 0865 272950

* **Oxfordshire County Museums,**
Fletcher's House, Woodstock, Oxon OX7 1SN.
Tel: 0993 811456

* **Passmore Edwards Museum,**
Romford Road, Stratford, London E15 4LY.
Tel: 01-519 4296

* **Peterborough City Museum & Art Gallery,**
Priestgate, Peterborough PE1 1LF. Tel: 0733 43329

* **Portsmouth (Cumberland House),**
Eastern Parade, Southsea PO4 9RF.

* **Portsmouth City Museum & Art Gallery,**
Museum Rd., Old Portsmouth PO1 2LJ. Tel: 0705 827261

* **Queen Elizabeth's Hunting lodge Museum,**
Rangers Road, Chingford, London E4.
Tel: 01-529 6681

* **Reading Museum & Art Gallery,**
Blagrove Street, Reading RG1 1QH.
Tel: 0734 55911 ext. 2242

* **St. Albans City Museum,**
Hatfield Road, St. Albans, Herts AL1 3RR.
Tel: 0727 56679

* **Southend Museums Service:**
Central Museum,
Victoria Ave, Southend-on-Sea, Essex.
Tel: 0702 330214

* **Stevenage Museum,**
St. Georges Way, Stevenage, Herts SG1 1XX.
Tel: 0438 54292

* **Tring: British Museum(Nat.Hist.)Bird Section,**
Tring, Herts HP23 6AP. Tel: 044-282 4181

WEST-CENTRAL & SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND

* **Barnstaple: Museum of North Devon,**
The Square, Barnstaple EX32 8LN.
Tel: 0271-46747

* **Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery,**
Queens Road, Bristol BS8 1RL. Tel: 0272 299771

* **Devizes Museum,**
41 Long street, Devizes, Wilts SN10 1NS.
Tel: 0380 77369

* **Dorset County Museum,**
High West St., Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XA.
Tel: 0305 62735

* **Exeter: Royal Albert Memorial Museum,**
Queen Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 3RX.
Tel: 0392 265858

* **Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery,**
Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AJ.
Tel: 0752 668000 ext. 4378

Somerset County Museum,
Taunton Castle, Castle Green, Taunton TA1 4AA.
Tel: 0823 55504

* **Truro: Royal Institution of Cornwall,**
County Museum, River St., Truro, Cornwall.
Tel: 0872 2205

* **Wells Museum,**
8 Cathedral Green, Wells, Somerset BA5 2UE.
Tel: 0749 73477

* **Woodspring Museum & Art Gallery,**
Burlington St., Weston-super-Mare, Avon BS23 1PR.
Tel: 0934 21028

DIARY DATES

5 February. Herpetofauna Recorders Meeting will take place at Manchester Metropolitan University. This annual meeting provides a forum for discussion and information exchange between amateur naturalists, professional biologists, statutory bodies and farming and forestry interests. Contact Dr M. Swan 19 St Judiths Lane, Sawtry, Huntingdon, PE17 5X, tel 0487 831984 (evening).

18 March 1994 is the start of National Science, Engineering and Technology Week to be organised by the British Association. Further details from Brian Gamble, British Association, Fortress House, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB, tel 071 494 3326.

27 March - 1 April 2nd European Congress of Mammalogy will take place at the University of Southampton. Details from Dr R.J. Putnam, Biology Dept., Boldrewood Building University of Southampton, SO9 3TU.

Using Natural History Collections -Focus On Education. Mon-Tues, 11-12 April 1994, Keble College, Oxford: the Spring BCG meeting is a joint venture with GEM to look at the educational use of natural history collections. The aim of the meeting is to bring educators and curators together to share expertise. By now all BCG members should have received information about the meeting, with a tear-off slip to be returned to me; if not contact your postperson! **Please return the slip so that I can send you details in January and it would be helpful to know how many people will want to attend.**

During the two days we will look at a variety of topics from the educational use of stuffed animal collections through to outdoor activities in Museum gardens. The programme will include visits to the Balfour Building, Pitt Rivers Museum, the Oxford Botanic Garden and Cogges Manor Farm Museum.

The AGM will be held on Monday together with the Annual Dinner; there will also be an opportunity before the Dinner to see the Hope entomological and the zoological collections at the University Museum.

The entire two-day programme, B&B, all meals including the Annual Dinner and a reception at the Museum costs £75 so I hope members will be able to manage to attend both days.

If you would like more details please contact me, Jane Pickering, University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford. OX1 3PW. Tel: 0865 272962. Fax: 0865 272970.

Collections Planning and Policies is the title of a joint ASC/SPNH meeting to be held at the Missouri Botanical Garden on May 11-15 1994. For those of you on unlimited budgets the contact is ASC, 730 11th Street, NW, Second Floor, Washington, D.C. 20001.

BCG Dutch Dash 94. BCG is hoping to organise a study trip to the Netherlands in late autumn 1994. It is intended that the trip would last 4-5 days and include visits to the museums in Leiden and Amsterdam. A first circular will be sent to all members at the beginning of January to gauge interest. If the response to this is not good the trip will not go ahead, so please ensure that you register your interest as early as possible.

19-21 April 1995. International Conference on valuing Natural Science Collections, Manchester University. See circular enclosed with this issue.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

SEARCH for Science in Hampshire - the background

For two or three years now Hampshire County Council Museum Service has been giving some thought to developing a more integrated natural science display policy for its network of local museums. It would be (and is in many museums I have visited including our own) all too easy to fall into the trap of approaching natural science displays as solely the interpretation of the local natural environment to a museum, in the same way that local history is tackled. Unlike local history, which by definition is very parochial, the natural environment is not constrained by parish, town or district political boundaries. It consists of far broader brush strokes and there is the very real danger of each display that is created covering the same themes and using the same examples. Or, looked at another way, it is conceivable that one display could be created which would be equally relevant at each location in a region.

This is a very real problem for us, particularly in densely populated south Hampshire, where we have three local museums within 15 miles of each other (Havant, Fareham, Gosport) together with Cumberland House Natural History Museum run by Portsmouth City Museums. What we needed then was a more strategic approach to our natural science provision.

Perhaps a blend of permanent and temporary exhibitions covering the interpretation of biological and geological processes as well as environmental and straight forward taxonomic displays. There was also a desire to encompass a broader range of biological and geological material than is easily displayed in a traditional gallery format and which can only really be achieved in a "hands on" type facility.

Another consideration has been the recent changes to education. The demands made on the service by schools and individual teachers asking for loans of biological material has risen dramatically since the introduction of the National Curriculum. Could we service this demand, and if so how?

In early 1992 the Museum Service had the opportunity to acquire premises adjoining Gosport Museum. The building was formerly a school and, more recently, offices of the Hampshire County Council Education Department. With this listed building came finance for the County Architects, not only to refurbish the building but also to reinstate lost architectural features.

Apart from one large hall most of the 6,000 square feet of accommodation was not suitable for use as traditional gallery space and, anyway, we would probably not have got the building in the first place if it was just to extend Gosport Museum. What we needed was a new initiative for Hampshire. Thus the South East Activity and Resource Centre for Hampshire (SEARCH) was born, now simply known as "SEARCH for Science" and "SEARCH for History".

The idea of providing a discovery centre for natural science (SEARCH for Science) and an active learning centre for history (SEARCH for History) targeted to a large extent at the education market soon gained political support and a steering group was established with input from myself, as Keeper of Biology, the Education Officer, the Marketing Officer and Conservation staff with Ian Edelman, the Curator of Gosport Museum, as the Project Manager. A three year development programme was formulated to commence April 1993. The Recreation Committee of Hampshire County Council have so far allocated £30,000 for capital development and £65,000 revenue funding for 1993/4. This has enabled us to appoint Ann Nicol, formerly at the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow and Leicestershire Museums, as a Natural Sciences Development Officer for the project.

Ann started with us towards the end of July 1993 and already the SEARCH for Science discovery room itself is fitted out and functional as our Museums Panel of County Councillors can testify - they were the first to try out the video microscope. However, I will leave

operational details and other developments for Ann to tell you about in a future article!

I would just like to end with this plea. An initiative like SEARCH has a knock on effect in other spheres of operation, not least for conservation and collections management. For us it has meant a complete reappraisal of our acquisitions policy. We now have a particular need and use for foreign material which in the past we refused or redirected to other museums. So if anyone is responsible for good quality non-data foreign material and wishes to investigate the possibility of transferring it to a good home would they please contact Ann Nicol at SEARCH, 50 Clarence Road, Gosport, Hants. PO12 1BU (0705 501957).

Chris Palmer, Keeper of Biology and Curator of Havant Museum, Hampshire County Council Museum Service.

PARROTS at Oldham and elsewhere

Pieces of Eight, Pieces of Eight; Polly, Pretty Polly; Punch on Parrots; Monty Python and the deceased Norwegian Blue; Endangered Hyacinth - these were all phrases racing around my mind as I took up the post of Exhibitions Officer in Natural History at Oldham Museum. My predecessor, Jane Mee, had completed a feasibility study into the idea of a parrot touring exhibition before moving on to Ludlow, leaving me with copious information and an exhibition to organise!

Part of the agreement with the Museums and Galleries Commission to obtain financial assistance was that the tour should be well booked and this was one of my initial tasks. To my surprise the tour was almost fully booked within about six weeks of advertising - all this before we even began to put the exhibition together. This, in my opinion, highlights the demand and need for touring exhibitions - unfortunately the subsequent closure of the touring exhibitions unit means that small local museums like Oldham will find it virtually impossible to obtain funding to tour exhibitions in future.

Parrots was an exciting venture because of its multidisciplinary approach, incorporating art, literature and humour within a natural history framework. I was also very pleased to be organising a touring exhibition in natural history because we seem to see so few of them around.

Much of my time initially was taken up with looking into the loaning of material as Oldham had very little in its own collection relating to parrots. Our access to items for the exhibition was determined largely by money - we could not for example afford to pay

couriers to accompany items from one museum to another. However, most of the museums approached were exceedingly helpful and agreed to loan relevant material.

The exhibition eventually came to fruition; loans were completed; text written and the exhibition designed and built. It opened in Oldham on April 4th 1993 and is currently touring.

Sian Owen, Exhibitions Officer (Natural History) Oldham Museum

University of Leicester, Dept of Museum Studies Science and Natural Science Courses

For the first time, the Department of Museum Studies is inviting applicants wishing to take individual one week science and natural science modules. These modules form part of the University Diploma/M.Sc. in Museum Studies. Students wishing to go on to take the other modules which make up the course will be credited with the modules they have already taken. Other modules look more closely at the non-discipline based aspects of curation, for example, preventative conservation, documentation practice, collection management policies etc.

Sciences 1: Science Collections, 28 Feb - 4 March 1994

This course will take a wide look at science collections in museums, and is aimed particularly at students interested in the history and philosophy of science. The course will examine the nature of these collections, practice in collecting and conservation, directions for research and the basics of collections management.

Sciences 1: Natural Sciences Curatorial Course, in collaboration with BCG, GCG and Leicester Museums, 7 March - 11 March 1994

A practical look at collecting and field recording techniques, preservation, conservation, storage, documentation, taxonomy and research. The course will discuss those aspects of curation which are specific to the natural sciences. It will include field and laboratory work, lectures and seminars. It will discuss in equal measure good practice in geology and biology.

This one week course replaces the Sheffield based Natural Sciences Curatorial Course. It aims to build upon the success of the Sheffield course particularly in its continued commitment to practical work but with the added incentive of potentially contributing to a recognised qualification in museum studies. The course is also run on a firmer footing as it no longer depends on student numbers to run.

Sciences 2: Communicating Science, 14 March - 18 March 1994

A look at how museums communicate science. This wide ranging course will examine techniques used in science and discovery centres, in exhibition, site interpretation, publication and education. Again the focus will be on developing techniques and knowledge which can be applied directly in the museum. It is for scientists of all disciplines.

Cost per course is £220. B&B accommodation is available at £13-£20 per night. I am afraid that the Department is no longer able to provide University accommodation for its part-time students, however, private accommodation lists will be sent on request. Contact: Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princes Road East, Leicester, LE1 7LG. Tel 0533 523963, Fax 0533 523960.

Simon Knell

PUBLICATIONS

Preserving Natural Science Collections: Chronicle of our Environmental Heritage is by W. Donald Duckworth, Hugh Genoways and Carolyn Rose. This American publication, now available through the National Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Property, synthesises information gathered from meetings, calls for public education about the importance and uses of natural science collections, and recommends the creation of a natural science conservation training programme. (Does that sound vaguely familiar?). Available from NIC, 3299 Street, NW, Suite 403, Washington, D.C. 20007 price \$16.50 incl p&p.

Index Kewensis. This important botanical publication is now available on compact disc at £995. The disc comprises the original publication plus all nineteen supplements published since 1893. Contact Janet Caldwell, Customer Services Manager, Electronic Publishing, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP (tel 0865 267979).

Beetles of Somerset by Andrew Duff contains details in 270 pages of 2298 local species giving a status summary, notes on dispersion, habitat, periodicity and national status with lists of all accepted records. Available from Somerset Archeological and Natural History Society, Taunton Castle, Taunton, TA1 4AD at £12.25 incl UK p&p.

Passages from The Natural History of Selbourne, Naturalist's Journal and other writings by Gilbert White is a selection of classics illustrated by the addition of wood engravings by Thomas Bewick. Available direct from Silent Books, Boxworth End, Swavesey, Cambridge, CB4 5RA for £11.20 incl p&p.

MEETING REPORTS

The care of spirit Preserved collections Seminar

The BCG seminar was a resounding success in spite of the IRA and their Reading bomb which resulted in one speaker and some delegates not making it past Cardiff and a second speaker being ill. Not many seminars these days have a waiting list for participants - thanks to Kathie Way and her superb organisation.

It was a singularly worthwhile day for all concerned - speakers and delegates alike - a full appraisal will appear in a future newsletter. It was good to see so many younger workers of the profession participating and a salutary lesson for some older members on how much we take for granted, how much we still don't know and how much we can still learn from each other. This was definitely a meeting in the Reg Harris tradition (see BCG Special Publication no 3 and the last Journal of Biological Curation). We obviously need a follow up meeting, with perhaps more time for a general discussion and maybe even a series of hands on workshops.

*Rosina Down,
University College, London*

SPNHC Conference, Victoria, June 1993: Flood Disaster at the Texas A & M University

The Conference was opened with a talk by Dr Geoff Scudder of the University of British Columbia. He talked about the importance of research collections in museums to those scientists who are endeavouring to uncover the mysteries of the natural world. He quoted many historical examples of discovery through museum collection research, adding that much time and expense would have been saved if some famous naturalists had started their groundwork in a museum collection rather than in the field. Using this maxim and the importance of precise field data, he pointed out the mistakes made by Darwin with the Galapagos finches and the muddling of their original but vague collection data. This has been subsequently re-worked by Sulloway (1982). He also quoted Batesian mimicry, by the palatable Viceroy butterfly, of the unpalatable Monarch but then, ironically, wiped out by pesticides; the interbreeding of butterflies caused by glaciation of ecosystems and the parallel effects caused by global warming if the boreal regions were to warm up by 8°C. The mention of DNA caused much rustling of paper as he quoted the recent research into specification of Miocene termites in amber - the oldest DNA yet extracted (15-30M years) and the subsequent elaboration of this and DNA cloning by the film *Jurassic Park*. He finished by advising curators and conservators against the required pulverising of

type specimens to extract DNA, a cautionary ending to a thought-provoking introductory talk.

From Dr Scudder's series of ideals and how a museum collection should be maintained and used there followed a series of 5 highly useful talks about coping with disasters and saving specimens at any cost. These talks were based on the flooding with hot water of a series of sub-basement storerooms, 20 feet below ground level, and containing the vertebrate part of the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection at the Texas A & M University during the night of the 30 October 1992. Kathryn Vaughan outlined how the disaster had been caused by a burst hot water main with subsequent flooding to a depth of 41 inches. How the workers had to cope voluntarily with unsafe conditions: darkness, electrical hazard, alcohol vapour - race against time versus personal safety. She outlined the emergency measures that were taken: computers with their precious data were the first to be removed (one hard disc was already submerged!) and with volunteer conservators working round the clock both animal skins and some 1.5M museum jars were removed with great rapidity but carefully. There were scarcely any jar breakages and although some dilution of fluids was noticed the specimens were subsequently found to have hardly suffered at all (stressing the need for good fixation). The skin cabinets were awash and dirty water flowed out as these were raised to ground level; the submerged skins that had not suffered too badly were immediately loaded into freezer trucks and sent to Fort Worth for freeze drying. At this point the importance of using waterproof ink for labelling was endorsed! George Baumgardner continued this talk informing us how documents were freeze-dried and then adherent mud was scraped off and how metal lids on jars were quickly replaced with plastic before corrosion products appeared. Some of the wooden specimen cases were damaged slightly during the moving and some others warped; many of the steel fixture cabinets contained up to 1.5 gallons each of water inside their framework and had to be drilled and drained!

Animal pelts gave more severe problems, especially those that had been submerged - the warm water quickly removing tanning salts from them and causing rapid deterioration. Catherine Hawks, who was called in to supervise the salvage of the pelts told us that some skins had gelatinised to protein glue and were a hazard in themselves. Part-gelatinised skins could be treated with alcohol immersion and the gelatinised protein removed; with much manipulation these skins were eventually saved. Less seriously affected skins were blotted and turned by volunteers, to air dry them. A combination of sunshine and breeze helped while the volunteers, gloved to protect against the more toxic

tanning salts, manipulated the drying skins repeatedly so that they would not become stiff. The chromium salt-tanned skins survived the best although some tide lines appeared on a few and other differently-treated skins. The results from the different tannages provided valuable information about the treated skins' hydro-thermostability - the temperature at which intra-molecular forces are greater than the inter-molecular forces causing the collagen fibres to swell and lose their tensile strength so that the skin starts to fall apart or gelatinise. Pelts with alum tanning, which gives a soft-to-the-touch and pretty white leather look, were found to dissociate above 35°C.

Aldehyde (oil tans) and polyhydroxy (phenolic and vegetable) tannages fared somewhat better. Mineral salt (chromium) tanning, which is less good to look at and to the touch, was found to have kept the temperature/shrinkage range to a minimum having the highest hydrothermal stability - skins could even survive intact in boiling water for a few minutes!

Steve Williams told us how skeletal material was dried carefully so as not to overdry, which can lead to cracking. Saturated skulls were frozen (causing some cracking anyway!), and were then dried in the huge freeze drier of the BMS Catastrophe Unit at Fort Worth. The less stable skins were freeze-dried in a large Virtis machine but the near 60°C of the hot water had caused some collagen distortion leading to cutaneous shrinkage.

Sally Shelton summed up the series of talks with a bottom line about prevention being better (and cheaper!) than cure. Bearing in mind that there was no insurance the freeze-drying bill came to \$200K, which was excellent value considering the power used, wear and tear and operation of the unit. The total bill came to about three-quarters of a million dollars to save 52K mammals, skins and 14K birds. She outlined how rapid decisions and responses had had to be taken in difficult and sometimes hazardous situations. She hoped that a greater awareness would prevail about the dangers of storing underground and a better awareness of preventive conservation through building design. She earnestly hoped that complacency would not be brought about by what she calls the Tornado Theory (we would say about lightning striking twice). Instead she advised a network system to be set up to get help more quickly and easily with a list of emergency conservators, freeze-driers, fresh storage cases, cardboard boxes and poly-bags for instant delivery together with an address for a trucking company with refrigerated lorries.

Considering that this was all caused by backed-up drains! A lesson to be learned with today's low budgeting and having to place irreplaceable objects, even if they had low market value, in a storage area below ground

level where there is risk of such inundation, and the requirement of personal safety and safety-approved procedure against the rapid deterioration timeclock.

Reference

SULLOWAY, F. J. 1982: *Darwin and his Finches the evolution of a legend*. Cambridge, Mass. USA.

Simon Moore
Hampshire County Council Museums Service
Winchester

The Zemaljski Museum Sarajevo

The Zemaljski Museum, or Land Museum of Sarajevo is situated on the banks of the fiercely contested Miljacka River, and has suffered considerable damage from missiles since the outbreak of war in Bosnia. The museum housed wide-ranging collections started under the Austro-Hungarian regime in 1885. The courtyard housed an important collection of 14th and 15th century limestone tombstones, but both the courtyard and the building itself are now severely damaged. The famous botanical garden dating from the museum's foundation is at risk from inhabitants desperately seeking firewood, and the collections in the museum building are unprotected from the elements. Most of the natural history collections have been destroyed by the lack of controlled environment. A group of local people are trying to take what action they can to save the remaining collections and stabilize and weather-proof the building. Support in the form of funds and materials is urgently needed from the international community. For further information contact Bosnia-Herzegovina Heritage Rescue UK, 9 Canterbury Mansions, Lymington Road, London NW6 2EW, tel 071 433 1142. (This note originally appeared in *Tak Tent*, the newsletter of the Scottish Museums Council, no.7 Oct 1993).

Natural History Enquiries at Bolton

In an attempt to learn more about our enquiry service the Natural History staff decided to monitor enquiries in great detail on a random day each month. This process is ongoing, but I thought that other members might find our results of interest. They are a 'per year' total.

By type of enquiry:

	Number	Hours	Time/ Enquiry
Telephone	2110	108	3 mins
Personal visitor	2050	151	4
Letter	112	24	13
	4272	283	4 mins

Subject of enquiry:

General	759	67	5 mins
Records Centre	365	57	9
Entomology	450	29	4
Other Zoology	450	22	3
Botany	112	5	2
Geology	329	24	4
Aquarium	280	8	6
Barometer			
Readings	56	4	4
BCG Business			
(Chairman)	197	22	3
For other			
Museum sections	760	25	2
General			
Museum enquiries	515	17	2
Total	4273	280	4 mins

Three staff handle the bulk of the enquiries so the direct service occupies less than 6% of our time!

Definite value for money! We hope.

Charging for enquiries at Bolton

Pressure to generate income resulted in the Natural History Section having to charge for enquiries from commercial organisations. We have to bring in £500 per year to 'break even'; anything over that can be spent as part of our budget. This was a worrying development, but **all** of our regular users happily pay, although we probably undercharge in real terms. We hit our target the first year, narrowly exceeded it in the second and have already passed it this year. Occasional enquirers pay £15 + VAT for a 'quickie', more if it takes longer. Several regular users have been persuaded to save money by paying an annual fee, based on their level of use of the service. In addition, we recharge our Environmental Health Service. Most Environmental Health Departments get costs awarded in successful prosecutions so, rather than complicating paperwork by also claiming our costs each time, we agreed on an annual recharge. Brief advice on the phone is still free, but anything in writing becomes chargeable. We have had no complaints.

Bolton Museum now also charges for commercial hire of specimens and for schools' services for non-Bolton, private and opted-out schools. If you charge for hiring or lending specimens, remember that you must register as a Seller of Dead Birds with the DoE! This costs some money so is not worth it unless you hire regularly.

Steve Garland
Bolton Museum

On Wenlock Edge: a New Permanent Display at Much Wenlock Museum

Much Wenlock Museum is a small local museum with a pleasing ambience, airy and light (UV filtered!), not too overwhelming or sophisticated, with a considerable number of objects on open display.

It is situated in the Shropshire town of Much Wenlock not far from Ironbridge and towards the north-eastern end of Wenlock Edge, a famous limestone escarpment - famed not only for its beauty but known to geologists throughout the World as a 'type locality'.

When £6,000 was allocated by the Leisure Services Committee (in August 1992) for the refurbishment of displays at Much Wenlock Museum, it was decided that the geology and natural history in particular required attention. The displays were old (1970's), captions and specimens in some disarray and the arrangement of cases and panels created a rather gloomy atmosphere at one end of the museum.

A Natural Starting Place for a Visit to the Edge?

The re-display of the natural history and geology presented several exciting opportunities.

The first of these was to interpret Wenlock Edge, using the County's collections, and to promote the museum as a visitor centre for the area

Secondly, to work in partnership with the National Trust (Mercia Region), the major conservation organisation active on Wenlock Edge

The immediate benefit to the Museum Service of collaborating with the Trust was seen as access to National Trust staff, familiar with the locality, and archives (photographs, biological records and management plans); of mutual benefit, the promotion of each others sites - the National Trust directing visitors to the Museum for more information, via on-site interpretation panels and leaflets, and the Museum display pointing people in the direction of places they could visit on the Edge to see for themselves the evidence of Wenlock's geological past, the relics of lime-burning, the National Trust's efforts to restore woodland, etc. In addition the Museum would provide the National Trust with an interpretive facility to explain their work in the area.

Once National Trust involvement was established, action was taken to increase the size of the budget available. Both the Countryside Commission and English Nature were approached with success (presumably success due in part to Wenlock Edge's status as an Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the number of SSSI's on the Edge).

The display was sold to the Countryside Commission as an interpretive facility that would enhance access to the countryside. Our case was somewhat strengthened by the location of the Tourist Information Centre in the museum foyer and a letter of support from the National Trust. Selling the project to the Countryside Commission was hard work, and then the conditions so readily agreed at the moment the offer was made, became extraordinarily exacting as deadlines approached.

Eventually the budget was raised to £10,000 with further financial support provided by the West Midlands Area Museum Service.

At this stage, and as the storyline was developing, we did contemplate the services of a designer for the project. However, it soon became very obvious that we could not afford one! So the display was designed and built in-house - down to the layout of the panels.

The theme was largely dictated by the Edge itself and the Much Wenlock Limestone of which it is made; its geological past - tropical, clear, shallow sea in which coral reefs flourished; how the escarpment was formed; wildlife and habitats - the influence of the limestone, exploitation of the limestone - quarries and lime-burning; the work of the National Trust to conserve Wenlock Edge and provide access and information for visitors.

Throughout, the emphasis was on displays that would encourage visitor participation and enhance a visit to the Edge. I was very keen to avoid gratuitous button-pushing, my colleague Nigel Nixon (Senior Curator) to provide displays that incorporated seating.

The display was designed for families visiting the area and although not directly geared to schools and the demands of the National Curriculum it provides a good introduction to several 'attainment targets' (particularly if used in conjunction with Wenlock Edge itself).

A Watery Past

McKerrow's book "*The Ecology of Fossils*" provided inspiration for what became the central display of the exhibition. It didn't take too much imagination to transform the line drawings of the Wenlock coral reef habitat (which existed in the Wenlock Edge area some 400 million years ago) with fossilized remains exposed as a rock shelf alongside into a 3-D model; into a 'living' sea; (behind glass and with dappled lighting effect) and fossil shelf, mirroring the 'living' scene, incorporating real fossils that can be touched (casts of the fossils were used in the living scene).

Three drawers were incorporated beneath the display to take our best fossil specimens; friendly graphics and

trilobite handles encourage people to open the drawers and benches alongside provide seating for appropriate levels of contemplation. The accompanying text is carried on trilobite bats (imagine a chopping board - trilobite on one site, text on the other) leaving the display uncluttered with words.

Photographs, on a panel hanging above, relate the Silurian reef scene to similar habitats in the world today and to reefs that can be seen fossilized *in situ* in the cliff and quarry faces of Wenlock Edge.

A visitor-operated model demonstrates how the Edge was formed. The simplicity of the final model, bicycle-pump and push-chair wheels provide the technology, belies the amount of effort that went into its design. Mechanical difficulties and establishing exactly what the model needed to demonstrate were only resolved after considerable and sometimes heated discussion and the model is a credit to the ingenuity of our technical staff (and the impetus of a shoe-string budget). And it met with the approval of the local geologists.

It was quite an interesting experience extracting a list of about 12 plants "characterizing" the Edge (wood, meadow and regenerating quarry) from three of the local botanists; and then establishing which reliably indicated the presence of limestone and even more difficult, the presence of an ancient wood or meadow; and then to find the relevant photographs (at no cost); Hairy Violet had to go - not even the botanist who had enthused about its presence on Wenlock Edge had captured it on film.

Symbols were used to indicate the preferences of the flowers (habitats, lime-loving, ancient habitat). I thought this was a pleasingly simple way of getting the message across but the use of symbols seemed to cause our graphic designer a considerable amount of stress.

The limestone approach also provided an excellent opportunity to transform wildly exciting dot (distribution) maps (taken from the 'Shropshire Flora') into an interactive display. Dot maps for yellow-wort, pyramidal orchid and heather and a sliding geology overlay make the connection between limestone and plant distribution (and again, you can sit down to do this one).

The 'Caring for Wenlock Edge' panel uses photographs to show the National Trust in action; opening up ancient routeways, excavating lime kilns, botanically surveying the 'Pudding Bag' (Yes! - a limestone meadow); putting up fences; taking down conifers (and the subsequent transformation of the ground flora) and my favourite - pollarding Wenlock's ancient limes.

One of the most pleasurable aspects of this project was the number of people who eventually became involved; from the National Trust staff who marched me up and down the Edge in search of lime trees and lime kilns, to the quarrymen from ECC Quarries, who found a magnificent lump of limestone with lots of fossils (What clues can you find to Wenlock's past?) and lined up to have their photograph taken (for comparison with the 19th century predecessors); from the scientists of Marine Research Labs who searched slide collections for aerial photographs of patch reefs, and Shropshire's naturalists who provided images of wild flowers to the town archivist and local historians who provided images and documents pertaining to the lime-burning industry.

The display has now been open for one season (April to September). We have received positive feedback from both members of the public and schools; a teachers' pack will be available next year and better promotion should increase the number of school visits, and yes, our man from the Countryside Commission is quite right, a leaflet is needed to help visitors make that link between display and countryside.

*Jane Mee
Curator of Natural Sciences,
Ludlow Museum*

ITS ALL GREEK TO ME

Has any one else received the letter below which was sent by Treda Ltd of Athens to Kelvingrove Museum? Although a suitable subject for our amusement there is a serious side to the approach which (and apologies to Treda if I have misconstrued their letter) seems to be seeking surplus specimens for resale. Anyway, here it is:

Sirs, We have a company of import - export and we are interested to supply from you some kinds.

- 1. For insects generally (butterflies - scarabees) from all over the world, but especially from Europe.*
- 2. For spiders, scorpions etc, either salted or proplastics.*
- 3. For fishes, salted, sea born, living on the borders of a lake or river fishes European, specially proplastics.*
- 4. For proplastics of dolphins, sharks, whales etc.*
- 5. For European shells.*

In Greece are going to be founded a lot of museums of Physical History and we intend to supply them all these kinds and the museums are going to create gift shops.

Our cooperation is going to be as follows: for every order you'll send us the proportionate invoices and we'll send you immediately the money.

You are kindly requested for lower prices in order to have profits, because as you know we are going to resell them.

The Greek Market is very interesting.

Looking forward to your answer and the relative price list, we hope our future cooperation will be profitable.

Faithfully yours

Beware Replica Eggs!

Hands up the readers of *The Mail on Sunday*. The accompanying magazine carried a conspicuous advertisement by Emerald Collectables for a series of life-size replica birds eggs "developed in liason with Colin Harrison - for 26 years curator of the British Museum's famous collection". The eggs do seem to be accurate replicas, Colin Harrison calls them the most accurate he has ever seen, and the vendors "expect the collection will discourage those wishing to steal birds eggs - after all why steal one when you can now legally own such a perfect replica?" Setting this dubious argument aside, the collection will have introduced to the open market a set of accurate fakes for potential substitution into museum collections. If even the tight security of the Jourdain Collection at Gloucester can be breached and clutches stolen (3 Gyr Falcon clutches have been noted as missing) it is galling to have to beware of yet another potential weapon in the armoury of the egg thieves.

Advertising Rates - relevant advertisements from suppliers etc. are welcome. The current rates (copy supplied) are:

Full page	£40 per issue
Full page (3 Consecutive issues)	£100 (total)
Half page	£25 per issue
Quarter page	£15 per issue
Inserts (350 supplied ready for insertion)	£25 per issue

Contact: The Editor, M A Taylor, Perth Museum, George Street, Perth, PH1 5LB (tel 0738 32488) OR The Treasurer, Ms K Way, Mollusca Section, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD (tel 01 938 8892).

Back Issues - The editor now has the stock of back issues. A full list will appear in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, any enquiries to the editor.

The views expressed in the Newsletter do not represent the views or policy of the Biology Curators Group Committee or membership except where specifically stated.

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