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In the first two years of its life the Centre staged a number of week-end demonstrations and activities with a rural flavour. These included sheep-shearing, using Jacob sheep which were then kept, spinning and weaving their wool, corn dolly making, woodcrafts, beekeeping, ferreting, pond making and ploughing by a team of shire horses. A number of these activities are still shown at certain times of the year as part of the museum education's department's programme. Such events have undoubtedly helped to stimulate interest in country-based crafts and practices and this fulfills another of the Centre's aims.

The Birmingham Nature Centre has been, and will continue to be a success as long as there are people around to care for its welfare. During its four year's existence a total of 575,000 adults and school children have passed through the turnstile. This represents a daily average of between 575 and 655 over the same years. In 1976 the Centre was among the six runners-up in the Museum of the Year Award. We realise there have been failures, but there have been an enormous number of successes.

David Walker
Birmingham Natural History Dept

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NATURAL HISTORY AT LUDLOW MUSEUM

The first proposal for a Museum in Ludlow is believed to have been made during the Napoleonic Wars. When Napoleon's brother, Lucien Bonaparte, was taken captive the Earl of Powis, in consequence of the King ordering that Ludlow or it's vicinity should be the abode of this distinguished prisoner, offered Dinham House as a temporary residence. Lucien lived there from December 1810 until June 1811 and during his enforced stay formed his own museum in the stables. On his departure from Ludlow Lucien left behind certain items which he hoped would form a nucleus for a town museum. A few years later it was suggested that the stable and barracks block of Ludlow Castle should be restored to house the museum, but nothing ever came of this, which is much to be regretted as it would have provided an ideal setting.

The actual founding of Ludlow Museum originated from a meeting held on the 12th October 1833, when the Ludlow Natural History Society came into being. In the printed notice of this meeting it was proposed "That there be a museum and library, illustrative of the various departments of science, for the use of members". It is interesting to see it also stated "That ladies be eligible to become members of

this Society" and "That the subscription of one guinea per annum shall become due on the first day of January in each year, and any member who shall neglect to pay this within one month from the above date, shall forfeit the sum of five shillings". The Committee for the first year consisted of Doctor Lloyd and the Rev. T. T. Lewis, (joint discoverers of the famous Ludlow 'Bone Bed') The Rev. T. Wellings, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Henry Meymott and Mr. Clark. Among the list of the original forty-five members were the names of T. A. Knight Esq. of Downton Castle who was then president of the Horticultural Society, author of the beautiful "Pomona" and of many papers on plant breeding, R. I. Murchison Esq. (later Sir R. I. Murchison) President of the Geological Society, the pioneer geologist who first described the Silurian System and Mr. Salwey a botanist.

At first the specimens were stored at Dinham House but as the collections grew rapidly it was soon agreed that larger premises would be required. In the second annual report of the 17th March, 1836 it said "The Committee of the Ludlow Natural History Society have much satisfaction in being able to announce that the prosperity of the institution continues undiminished and notwithstanding the expenditure which has been incurred in the purchase of new cases, and in other improvements connected with the museum, the funds of the Society are in a prosperous state. The Committee have to congratulate the Society on the removal of it's collection to a more spacious and convenient situation allowing a better arrangement of specimens". It also mentions that "The museum has received great improvement from the attention of those gentlemen who have undertaken the duties of curators, and considerable progress has been made in it's classification and arrangement, so as to render it a useful source of reference to the student of natural history, and worthy of the spirited support with which it has been encouraged". A list of accessions is appended which includes donations of a pine marten, polecat, weasel and several bird species. It is also to be noted in the same report that several birds, including a pair of snowy owls, were purchased by the society.

About the year 1840 special museum premises were built in Mill Street, and although this is just within Queen Victoria's reign the style of architecture is Georgian and so blends well with many other buildings of the town which had been constructed during the second half of the eighteenth century, when Ludlow enjoyed a burst of prosperity as a select residential centre. In the report of the 24th January, 1847, owing to increasing expenses a reminder is given about unpaid subscriptions. The specimens were thoroughly cleaned and for the most part newly labelled and during the same year there was a great increase in the number of specimens received. By 1848 fresh subscribers were urgently required, for the report says "The Society is burthened with a debt of £200 - the interest of which weighs heavily on the resources,

and to pay off which no means present themselves, but continued economical management, and the unremitting exertions of the present members to increase their numbers''.

Lectures were frequently held in the museum room and the printed notices advertising these would do credit to the sensational press of our own day. The evolution controversy had reared its head in Ludlow and there is a poster advertising lectures by J. W. Salter the geologist on the 22nd and 23rd July, 1863 which endeavoured to show there would be a future harmony of science with religion (no doubt meaning evolutionary ideas), and suggesting that the order of creation is given in the scripture chronology of the inspired books with the probable explanation of the 'days', while a Mr. D. Mackintosh in lectures held on the 26th November and the 3rd and 10th December of the same year bitterly opposed any idea of the evolution of man.

By 1866 it was noted that four additional cases of birds had been completed by Mr. H. Shaw the Shrewsbury taxidermist. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and indeed until the time of the 1914-18 war everything seemed as if it would go on progressing to better things. As well as biological material, Ludlow Museum at that time contained a superb geological collection and many objects of local history interest. The outbreak of the 1914-18 war altered a whole way of life and in the years which followed there was a decline in interest. Those people who had done so much during Victorian times had either passed on or had grown old and the younger generation had neither the money nor the leisure time to devote to scientific hobbies. The county land-owners, members of the medical profession and the clergy who made up a considerable percentage of the old time naturalists of this district, many of whom did some really splendid work, were, with the evils of inflation and taxation, finding it difficult to make ends meet. In consequence the museum suffered and even attendance figures dropped; however, even then some really excellent work was still being done to keep things going by the honorary curator, Doctor J. G. Lang, (then in his eighties) and a few other stalwart supporters.

After the Second World War the museum was administered, first of all, by the Borough Council and then later by the Salop County Council. Unfortunately many of the old collections had deteriorated and nearly all the biological and geological material had been disposed of to other museums, schools and private individuals. The countrywide revival of interest in the natural sciences and local history which came after the war was beginning to be felt in Ludlow, and twenty years ago it was decided that a part-time curator should be appointed. The author secured the post, and as well as having curatorial duties, was to be attendant, typist and book-keeper. The post was later made a full-time one.

The biological and geological specimens had long since gone, but, I was determined that the tradition in natural sciences which had grown up in Ludlow over so many years should be maintained and immediately set about re-building the natural history collections. I brought in most of my own specimens and was fortunate in being able to recover some of the old Ludlow museum items, from various places. At that time the display and reference material was housed at the Butter Cross, but a museum office was provided for me in the branch library. The collections soon outgrew the storage space so I was later offered the old Ludlow fire station to house the specimens - this building also had some useful workroom space. By then I had an attendant and part-time secretarial help together with some splendid volunteers. Attendance figures rocketed and in the year 1966 we had nearly 36,000 visitors. The museum came under the County Education Committee then, but although now administered by the Leisure Activities Committee our close liaison with schools continues and school visits and excursions are still a feature of our work at Ludlow. It was a great step forward when I was provided with a part-time museum assistant; Mr. Bernard Thirsk being appointed to the post. When he left, Ann Waite was appointed part-time administrative assistant and later Howard Cheese (previously a part-time attendant) was appointed as full-time technician.

As time went on even the Old Fire Station became too small for our reference collections, and we have now moved into an Old Primary School building which has become the centre for the County Museum Service Natural Sciences Collections. Here we have a well-lit lecture room on the first floor in which Birmingham University extra-mural classes are held and talks given to groups of school children and other students. A flourishing biological records centre also functions in our Old Street premises. Until 1974 Ludlow was the only museum administered by the Salop County Council, but during that year, Mr. McCabe was appointed as County Museum Curator and since then the Information Centre at Ludlow and a farm museum at Acton Scott have been started. Much Wenlock Museum has joined the Service and we have acquired a store at Whitchurch in the north of the county.

Some of our natural history specimens are kept specially as loan material for schools, which can be borrowed by teachers in the South Shropshire area during school term to illustrate biology lessons and to interest children in their Shropshire Country heritage and its conservation. Naturally loan material has to be restricted to the less important specimens.

The geological reference collection now consists of approximately 30,000 specimens. The following is a brief summary of our biological collections at present. I would be very glad to know the whereabouts of any other, so far, undetected material from the old Ludlow museum.

HERBARIUM

The collection consists almost entirely of British material, most of the specimens being local. They are mounted on standard size sheets, except for those in their contemporary albums, where they are often accompanied with water-colour drawings; such examples are those which were collected by the late Miss M. D. Wood of Whitton Court. There is a microscope slide collection of bryophytes formed by the late Rev. N. F. Tripp. The Rev. T. W. Bree was a well known early 19th century botanist and we are fortunate in having a collection of pteridophytes formed by him between the years 1810 and 1817. Some very interesting correspondence about lichens from 1823-1842 to and from the Rev. T. Salwey contains letters with the original penny black stamps. We have a useful collection of flowering plants, most of which are from the Welsh Borderland.

INVERTEBRATES OTHER THAN INSECTS

There are small but useful collections of sponges, coelenterates and echinoderms also a few flatworms, roundworms and annelids. We have a fairly large collection of shells of British and foreign marine molluscs with an almost complete and well documented series of British land and freshwater species, and there are also a few arthropods other than insects.

INSECTS

British Odonata in two cabinets of 12 and 8 drawers. There are also smaller collections of Diptera, Hymenoptera and other orders. The collection of British Coleoptera is in a 20 drawer cabinet and belonged to the late Miss Frances Pitt, a celebrated Shropshire author, naturalist and wild-life photographer. Specimens of British and foreign Lepidoptera are contained in 14 cabinets (ranging from 6 drawers to 32 drawers), and in 91 store boxes.

FISHES

About 60, mostly British.

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Approx. 60, British and foreign.

BIRDS

Approx. 400 mounted specimens, mostly British (including the old Whitchurch Museum material) and collections of British Birds' eggs.

MAMMALS

Approx. 75 mostly British; also a small amount of osteological material.

JOHN NORTON
LUDLOW MUSEUM

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NATURAL HISTORY IN STAFFORDSHIRE

The Natural History Section of the City Museum and Art Gallery of Stoke-on-Trent has received from the Staffordshire County Museum at Shugborough their entire collection of Natural History material. This move allows Shugborough to concentrate on aspects of Staffordshire folk life and agricultural history, whilst the new museum at Stoke becomes the major county centre for biological and geological recording, collections and information.

Although the new museum will not open to the public until the end of this year the collections are housed in new storage rooms and are available for study by interested persons. Thus any information required regarding collections or recordings in Staffordshire can now be obtained from this one source.

Geoff Halfpenny
Don Steward

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