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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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F O U N D

PERTH ENIGMA SOLVED

The five entries incorrectly listed as at Perth Museum in Sherborn's "Where is the - collection" (1940) as mentioned in the last issue were the result of a rare error on the part of Sherborn himself. Ron Cleevely (Dept. of Palaeontology, BM NH) wrote to point out that the files and letters pertinent to Sherborn's work are preserved and sent a copy of a letter from Rodger Waterston to J. R. le B. Tomlin (5 April 1938). This was the source of information Sherborn used and in the letter almost entirely devoted to discussing Buchanan White's collections at Perth is a somewhat ambiguous mention of the five names, but with reference to the Royal Scottish Museum.

In the knowledge that Sherborn was an extremely able and proficient cataloguer this was an uncharacteristic mistake on his part but perhaps an excuse can be made for him in that this work was one of his last and he was to die in 1942 aged 81 years. E.G.H.

Information received, thanks to BCG.

My recent appeal for information about the J. Cooper collection of mammal skeletons (BCG Vol.2 No.8) led to instantaneous success. The actual collector, John Cooper, now works in the BM (NH) Palaeontology Department and BCG member Tony Hutson, of the BM (NH) Entomology Department, very kindly showed him the article.

John Cooper then rang me to establish that it was his collection, and very helpfully offered to send us photocopies of his original catalogue. The catalogue provides detailed background information on all the specimens, and so greatly enhances the collection. We are most grateful to John Cooper for this information, and to Tony Hutson for passing on the query.

I also received news of another collection of 'Denton's Patent Butterfly Tablets' from Mrs. Morgan of the Zoology Department at Bangor University, who will be writing a note to the newsletter herself about the collection. So, having scored successes with two of my list of queries, I am still hoping for news of the Polar Bear. Further (verbal) information from previous staff seems to indicate that the specimen was sold, not destroyed, and was later seen 'in some sort of grotto'. Perhaps even now it is lurking behind the gnomes in Santa's Magic Cave somewhere, lavishly draped in tinsel and snarling in festive fashion?

Penny Wheatcroft,  
Keeper of Natural History,  
Horniman Museum,  
London.

FOUND - H.M.S. SYLVIA

It would appear that there were several ships called H.M.S. "Sylvia" engaged in hydrographic surveying during the 19th Century. One 'Sylvia' was used, sometime between 1844-53, by Commander Sheringham in his survey of the south coast of England and another is recorded by J.J. Colledge. (Ships of the Royal Navy : An historical index 1966 vol 1) as being a screw sloop built in 1866. Presumably the duplication of names is a result of the well established naval custom of naming a ship after a predecessor.

An H.M.S. "Sylvia", presumably the later version, visited the Red Sea in 1872 and brought back sounding samples which were later examined and acquired by Sir John Murray, whose collection of deep sea deposits was eventually transferred to the British Museum (Natural History) in 1920. The specimens at Bolton Museum from the east coast of Africa may well have been from part of this voyage.

H.M.S. "Sylvia" was later sent to survey the coasts of South America, especially the straits of Magellan and to observe the Transit of Venus in December 1882. (Admiral G.S. Ritchie. 1967, The Admiralty Chart). She was commanded by Captain William James Lloyd Wharton (1843-1905). His previous command had been of H.M.S. "Shearwater" in the survey of the Mediterranean and East Coast of Africa in 1872-76 and he had just completed writing his classic, "Hydrographic surveying : a description of the methods employed in constructing Marine Charts" (London 1882). He was recalled from H.M.S. "Sylvia" in 1884 to succeed Sir Frederick Evans (1815-1885) as Hydrographer of the Navy. Presumably the "valuable collection" acquired by the British Museum (Natural History) in 1882-3 (Gunther, A.E. 1912. "Appendix to the History of the collections contained in the Natural History Departments of the British Museum") were from this voyage. Unfortunately neither this Appendix or volume 2 gives details of the size of the collection, its provenance or the taxa which it contained. It was presented by a Mr L.D. Wodsworth, of whom I can find no mention in the scientific literature. He was presumably either the naturalist or surgeon, for him to have devoted sufficient time to natural history during the rigour of surveying.

PETER LINGWOOD