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Title: Reg Harris: an Appreciation

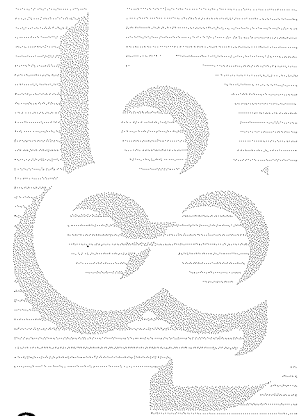
Author(s): Down, R.

Source: Down, R. (1987). Reg Harris: an Appreciation. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter, Vol 4 No 8*, 146 - 147.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1171>

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## NEWSLETTER

Vol 4 No 8

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## Reg Harris: an Appreciation

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An Appreciation of Reg Harris  
by Rosina Down

The death of Reg Harris FMA, Hon FLS, MIBiol, founder member of BCG, has left a gap that will be difficult if not impossible to fill.

Reg was born in 1920 over a jeweller's shop, of which his father was manager, on the corner of Hampstead and Euston Road in Central London. Interested in Natural History from an early age, he joined the staff of E. Gerrard, Royal College Street, straight from school. He moved to the Wellcome Museum of Medical Science (just over the road from his home) in 1936. The war saw him in the Navy, in the Laboratory at RNH Haslar, from 1939-1941, aboard HMS Colinwood from 1941-1943 as Sick Berth Petty Officer in the Sick Quarter Laboratory, and attached to the Royal Netherlands Navy on the Hospital Ship HMHC Ophir, Eastern Fleet, in 1943, both of which took him to numerous exotic places.

Returning to the Wellcome Museum in 1946, he moved on after a year to the Zoology Department UCL as a Teaching Technician. Appointed Curator of the Museum of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy a year later, a post the then current Professor relinquished in Reg's favour, he realised the vision of a former Professor, JP Hill, "for a trained zoologist who was also a good technician". His time at UCL was a fruitful one for the Museum with much new skeletal material being prepared; the collections were overhauled and the mammoth task of reclassifying and recataloguing was begun. His experimentation at this time produced new ways of preparing teaching specimens, one of which he came to regret in future years because of the long term problems of specimens embedded in resin.

The move to the British Museum (Natural History) as Experimental Officer in 1956 gave Reg the time and the scope to develop further experimentation in new ways of specimen preparation. The work for which he is best known began in 1960 after a talk with

Dr Meryman (a Washington Naval Physicist) who described a method of drying entire biological samples in their natural shape and proportion without distortion. A subsequent meeting with Dr Roland Hower of the Smithsonian Institute led to the technique being developed simultaneously in the USA and the UK. Together with Edwards High Vacuum the highly successful Ef2 freeze-dryer was evolved, which is used all over the world. The arrangement of spring flowers buried in Westminster Abbey in 1977, as part of the Queen's Jubilee Year celebrations, were freeze dried by Reg.

Work on other applications of freeze-drying for stereoscan electron microscopy, marine archaeology (including the earliest ship's brush ever preserved), marine zooplankton and geological applications together with critical point drying followed. He was deeply involved with the problems of biodeterioration and very keen that this work should be continued by other workers.

"Retirement" in 1980 saw him moving to Alderney for four years to become Curator of the Alderney Museum, where he discovered just how hard a 'general' curator's life can be. Back on the mainland he was still involved in promoting interest in research into biodeterioration and took part in seminars for the Leicester University Museum Studies courses.

A very private man devoted to his family, Reg had a keen sense of humour and was a fund of knowledge. He had the rare gift of communicating his love of and boundless enthusiasm for everything connected with natural history and geology, which has enriched the lives of countless students, technicians and many others.

A student himself of the Working Men's College he was awarded among others the Foster Memorial Prize for Bacteriology in 1939 and the Fotheringham Prize for Geology in 1949, and invited to teach biology in 1950. He taught biology and museum techniques on the Science Laboratory

Technicians Course in the evenings at Paddington Technical College for many years.

It was said of E Ray Lankester (a former Professor of the UCL Zoology Department and Director of the BM(NH)) that "he influenced the whole course of Zoology in the British Empire". I think the same could be said of Reg Harris's influence on the course of practical biological techniques.

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- 1958 The extraction of bones from bird pellets. Essex Nat., 30 (2).
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- 1968 Edited: Life on Earth, Hamlyn
- 1968 Book review in Laboratory Practice, 17.
- 1969 Nature collecting, Hamlyn. (republished 1972 by Grosset & Dunlop Inc in USA and Canada)

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- 1976 Preparation techniques for biological material. BCG Newsletter, 1 (2), 2-5.
- \*1976 Freeze-drying of marine Zooplankton. IV Monograph on Oceanographic Methodology "zooplankton fixation and preservation". UNESCO Press, Paris.
- 1978 Biodeterioration. BCG Newsletter, 1 (8), 3-1½
- 1979 Introduction to Freeze-drying Biological Specimens, a laboratory manual. R.O. Hower. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington.
- 1979 The conservation of one of the earliest known examples of a fluid preserved injection dissection (of a Marine Coelentrate from the John Hunter Collection). Mus. Journ., 79, 71-72.
- 1984 A Selective Bibliography on Preservation, Macro and Micro - anatomical Techniques. BCG Special Report, 3.

\* Original work - none previously carried out.

Papers given at Seminars, etc. (thought not to have been published).

- 1968 Conservation in the Natural Sciences. City of Liverpool Museums Service Symposium.
- 1974 Preservation techniques in the Natural Sciences - Modern Methods.
- 1975 Invertebrate preservation techniques in the small and medium museum. Norfolk Museums Service Symposium, Norwich.
- 1977 Course in Natural Sciences. Booth Museum of Natural History, Brighton.
- 1983 Freeze Drying - Miracle or Menace? AMSSEE Seminar at the Powell Cotton Museum. (review only published in AMSSEE News, April 1984).  
note: AMSSEE had photocopies of notes on invertebrate and plant material, and these may still be available.

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#### MDA Museum Terminology Group

BCG have been approached by this recently established informal working party to assist with the co-ordination and development of museum terminology control initiatives.

In due course the group will turn its attention to terminology control specific to particular disciplines and will be seeking assistance from specialist curatorial groups.

Initially, I shall attempt to collate ideas and comments specific to the biological disciplines from members and forward these to the new group.

Has anyone produced a thesaurus, standard list of terms, or internal conventions relevant to any aspect of cataloguing biological specimens? Please could I see examples, as it seems a waste to re-invent the wheel, or duplicate work currently in hand.

Please note that this applies to both MDA and non-MDA users. BCG would like to hear from you.

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