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value as I may be able to track down firmer information from your clues.

2. Personal knowledge, unusual uses to which material in your collection has been put; if possible give dates, nature of usage and out-turn.
3. Documented instances, an unusual usage that has been documented, albeit perhaps only in correspondence.
4. Published references or reviews. Please send me the citation of any reference to unusual usages that you come across in the literature. Especially valuable would be a note about any review articles, similar to Genoways, H H (1979).

I think information on usage of overseas collections would be equally valuable, so do not restrict yourself to uses of collections in U K institutions. Also usages apparently only of local value should be reported, as they may well turn out to have wider implications.

I intend the project to be continuous so there is no final date for sending information; periodic progress reports will be made in the BCG Newsletter, and once we see the scale and scope of the information submitted the best method(s) of disseminating the information will be discussed with the Committee.

References

Genoways, H H, et al 1979. Systematists, other users and uses of North American collections of recent mammals. MUSEOLOGY No 3. Texas Tech. Univ., Lubbock, Texas.

Morgan, P J, 1986. A NATIONAL PLAN FOR SYSTEMATIC COLLECTIONS? National Museum of Wales/Biology Curators Group, Cardiff.

Wheatcroft, P, 1987. Merely Rubbish. MUSEUMS JOURNAL 87 (3): 133-134.

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[Redacted]



NEW DIRECTOR FOR THE BRITISH MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY)

The Board of Trustees, with the approval of the Prime Minister has appointed Dr Neil Robert Chalmers as Director of the Museum, from 2 November 1988.

[Redacted]

Dr Chalmers, aged 46, has been Dean of Science at the Open University for the last three years, and was employed previously as a Senior Lecturer in Biology since joining the University in 1970. His first employment was as a Lecturer in Zoology at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda from 1966 to 1969 and he was Scientific Director at the National Primate Centre, Nairobi, Kenya from 1969 to 1970. He has a First Class Honours Degree in Zoology from Magdalen College, Oxford, and a PhD in Zoology (Animal Behaviour) from St John's College, Cambridge.

Dr Chalmers emphasizes the astonishing size and richness of the Museum's collections, together with the popularity and educational importance of the Museum's exhibitions to visitors of all ages. "We are a world leader among Natural History Museums. Our work directly benefits science, medicine, agriculture and the natural environment. Our exhibitions will be lively and topical - we aim to educate our visitors while we entertain them."

The Director's appointment is for a fixed term of five years, renewable by agreement between all parties. He is responsible to the Board of Trustees for all aspects of the operation of the Museum, for advising the Board on policy and planning matters, and for ensuring the policies and plans are implemented. The Director is the Accounting Officer for the Museum and is responsible to Parliament for the proper expenditure of public funds voted by Parliament through the Office of Arts and Libraries.

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REFERENDUM RESULTS

The referendum resulting from a motion passed by a majority vote at the 1987 AGM has now been completed and the votes counted as follows:

- I support the policy of the British Museum (Natural History) to charge visitors for entrance to the museum2
- I do not support the above policy53
- Abstentions2

The Committee has, in accordance with the wishes of the 1987 AGM, sought a mandate from the membership which clearly indicates that we should take action. Additional comments on the returned ballot forms are as follows.

What the Membership Says!

"Taxonomic research bears no relationship to the displays built by the display team. Why should school parties fund taxonomic research"

"The introduction of charges for entry to any national museum is deplorable. The statistics of attendance, post-introduction of charges usually indicate a sharp fall in numbers of

visitors. This is particularly sad in the case of BMNH where a great many of the visitors are children. I support any initiatives by the Committee to oppose charging for entry to museums"

"I deplore the current trend that everything must be paid for by the consumer, irrespective of means, rather than from the general public purse. The concept of free admission to museums is one on which I am prepared to make a stand"

"This policy deprives the public at large of what is legally and historically their facility. Past donors will turn in their graves as people walk past the door"

"I had better come clean and confess to working at the BM(NH). Charges are not popular round here. For one thing, British taxpayers have paid for the Museum already. Charging for specific exhibits, audio-visuals etc (changed regularly!) would be OK. We are improving our merchandise and trying to up sales; and are hiring out the big halls for parties, conferences etc. Latter is not without problems, but these are not insurmountable"

"I also deplore the "concessionary" entrance fee for museum staff. I know that the BM(NH) is to look at this issue in the near future. BCG should press for its replacement by free admission"

"I feel very strongly that all museums funded by central government or local government should have free admission so that they can be easily available to everyone regardless of ability to pay"

"Lobbying should be directed at restoring sufficient funds to remove the necessity to charge entrance fees. Would like to know figures of income and actual "profit" against loss of revenue from shop's counter sales etc"

"If there has to be a policy of charging - which I cannot accept as justifiable - then I would strongly advocate the introduction of a scheme for regular visitors"

"The contents of the National Museums belong to the nation ie the people. Why should the people have to pay to see what is in fact theirs?"

"Charging visitors undermines the educational role of the museum and encourages the development of "sensational" and unscientific displays in order to bring in visitors. This in time will tend to decrease the potential serious visitors"

"Probably the same as many others - National collection should be free at least to nationals. Question of tourists (non-British) paying is a different question"

"As one born and educated in London, to whom BM(NH) was my local nat hist museum, I feel strongly no charge should be made. My

lifelong interest in museums and natural history started in the BM(NH) in about 1946"

"I also feel that taxonomic assistance to fellow museum biologists, in the bona fide pursuit of their professional duties, should remain free, though I would not object to other bodies or the public being charged a small fee" *

"It is also most regrettable that charges are being made for scientific services such as identifications, in some cases, to other museums. The obvious result of this will be the prevention of development of scientific research and the dissemination of knowledge" *

"This seems rather untimely:

- 1 BMNH galleries still attract large numbers of visitors
- 2 The charges have led to withdrawal of the risk of immediate redundancies
- 3 Other museums are now charging/ investigating charges

[How many Galleries employing BCG members have charges?]"

"I can't complete this referendum because it is ambiguous - I think. If I support the policy implicitly I'm supporting the Thatcherite view that everything in life must be bought by the individual. On the other hand, if I don't support it, I gather that a lot of BMNH people would have to be sacked, so I've got to support it, but I can't so I won't. By the same token I can't support the protesters, because I don't want to jeopardise other people's jobs"

"As an employee of the BMNH I feel that it would be invidious for me to comment on the above, but am returning this to show that my refusal to comment is not due to lack of interest"

"Please find the enclosed referendum regarding charges at the British Museum. I personally feel that it is detrimental to museums as a whole for our national institutions such as the BM to charge entrance fees. These museums have had the goodwill of the public from both Britain and overseas, goodwill that will quickly disappear if the policy of charging at an economical rate becomes well established.

I hope the BCG will be able to put pressure on museum authorities, over this matter, as I have felt for quite a long time that it is not necessarily the attitude of the government that has brought this state of affairs, but the attitude of the profession as a whole"

Compiled by Derek Whiteley
BCG Secretary

*There is obviously some confusion here. BM(NH) staff have dealt with two of my enquiries during March 1988, without charge. It appears that some museums are being charged. DW.

Letters on any of the above issues are most welcome, but should be addressed to the Editor.