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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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# AGM 89

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
HELD AT DUNDEE MUSEUM ON FRIDAY 19 MAY  
1989 at 4.30pm

1 Apologies were received from Adam Wright, Tim Riley, Gordon Reid, Peter Davis, Paul Harding, Geoff Stansfield, Margaret Hartley, Jerry Lee, Willie Milne, Ray Mahoney.

2 Minutes of the 1988 AGM were approved, proposed by Derek Lott, seconded by Geoff Hancock.

3 Chairman's Report. Steve Garland read a report on the Group's activities (to be published in the Newsletter).

4 Secretary's Report. Derek Whiteley read a report on the Committee's activities (to be published in the Newsletter).

5 Editor's Report. John Mathias read the Editor's Report (to be published in the Newsletter).

6 Treasurer's Report. Adam Wright sent copies of the accounts for 1987/88 and 1988/89 for circulation and comments. AGM endorsed the Committee's decision to hold subscriptions at the present rates for a further year. Acceptance proposed by Steve Moran, seconded Paul Richards.

7 Election of Officers and Committee

## Officers

Chairman: Steve Garland  
Secretary: Derek Whiteley  
Treasurer: Adam Wright  
Editor: John Mathias

## Special Publications

Editor: Gordon Reid  
Committee members: Clem Fisher, Kathie Way, Jerry Lee, Willie Milne, Colin Plant, Rosina Down were re-elected unopposed.

Membership Secretary: Kathie Way, proposed by Clem Fisher, seconded by Rosina Down.

## Committee

Phil Collins, Steve Moran and Howard Mendel have served three years and retire.

Richard Sutcliffe (Glasgow) proposed Steve Moran, seconded Willie Milne. Alec Coles (Sunderland) proposed Derek Whiteley seconded Steve Garland were duly elected unopposed.

8 Date and place of next AGM. Manx Museum, Douglas, Isle of Man early May 1990 (date to be announced in the Newsletter).

9 There was no other business and the meeting closed at 5pm.

Derek Whiteley  
BCG Secretary

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It has been another busy year for BCG. On the publications front you will soon receive the first issue of our JOURNAL and two special leaflets on Animal Rights Groups and Collection Disposals. In addition, the Manual of Biological Curatorship is moving forward at last.

Our meetings programme is fairly well filled for the next year or two, although if anyone is keen to organise any others, or has ideas for themes, let the Committee know.

In addition to our previous monitoring of collections at risk this year we have kept detailed records of biology posts lost or created. Please inform the Committee if you hear of any such losses or gains.

Since the publication of the Museums Association's Report, BIOLOGY COLLECTIONS - UK, there has not exactly been a leap in the good fortunes of natural history collections. However, some Area Museum Councils are seriously pursuing the idea of peripatatic biology curators and some money, albeit limited at present, has been forthcoming from the Museums and Galleries Commission. BCG's Sunflower Campaign starts at this AGM.

The Museums Association has organised a meeting of relevant bodies in June to discuss the way forward; BCG will be present and will be pushing hard for resources. We will also be presenting a session at the MA Conference in York in September. However, as always, the final success or failure of this campaign will depend mostly on the support and activity of BCG's membership. The success of the 'Beetle Down ...' campaign is now a matter of record and the Secretary will report further on this.

Steve Garland  
Chairman

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

It has been an exceptionally busy year for your Committee. We met five times; once at Sheffield Museum, three times at University College, London, and yesterday here in Dundee. Once again, our sincere thanks go to these

institutions for their generous hospitality. In addition, I would like to thank the Director and my colleagues at Sheffield Museum for their support and the resources they have made available to maintain the BCG secretariat.

Another successful AGM was held at Bolton, once again very well attended. The Exeter meeting in the autumn never materialised, owing to a variety of reasons; but this year we can definitely look forward to an interesting seminar in north Devon in October. Details, already finalised, will appear in the Newsletter.

For me, the year was dominated by the Beetle-down campaign and the curatorial course held jointly with GCG at Losehill Hall in October. Seventeen attended (about twice the number expected) and everyone felt that the rather intensive course was successful and should be repeated (with a few modifications). As course organisers, we also learned a great deal; not least of all the problems of organising a course. We can go into the next one with much more confidence. Special thanks, here, are due to Steve Moran for doing the donkey work on the programme and Peter Davis our resident course tutor.

Returning to Beetle-down, an interim report has already appeared in Newsletter 5(2) and we are having another session tonight. For now, suffice to say that the campaign and events have been more successful than we ever imagined. They have really put natural history up front, and we haven't finished yet.

A new campaign 'Our Neglected Natural Heritage' will be launched this evening. This hard-hitting campaign is part of our response to the MA Report 'Biological Collections UK' discussed at our two previous AGMs, and finally launched last August with a fair amount of national press and radio coverage.

The bread and butter work of the Committee continues. We now operate two watchdog schemes; one on collections at risk and a new one on biology posts lost and created. Both will be reported in some detail in future Newsletters, but for now, suffice to say that we have found suitable homes for a number of collections, put pressure on certain authorities to look after their collections, and we have had a limited but definite effect in getting some posts unfrozen or re-established by applying direct pressure to some authorities, and organising lobbying of others. The threat of removal from the Beetle-down 'BCG-accredited' list is quite useful here.

Our relationship with the Natural History Museum, formerly BM(NH), has improved somewhat since our summit meeting in February with Dr Chalmers and his keepers of Botany, Entomology and Zoology. We now have a greater understanding of each other's problems, more NHM staff involvement with BCG, and the possibility of joint meetings, although we beg to differ on certain issues; Kathie Way is the NHM unofficial representative on Committee.

Also, we maintain a useful dialogue with the Museums Association. We have kept the pressure on for curatorial biology to be included in the old-style and new-style Diploma training. We have 90 minute slot at the MA Centenary Conference in York, and we are organising an MA Seminar on Natural History for the Non-specialist Curator in Glasgow in February. Phil Collins has represented our interests on the Specialist Groups Committee, and the MA frequently consult us on biological matters.

We have established contacts with M&GC, the Conservation Unit, Department of the Environment Licensing Section and NFBR - all relevant to the everyday work of natural history curators. Rosina Down and Di Smith maintain close links with the GCG Committee, and both groups exchange minutes.



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Finally, my thanks go to all members of a hard-working Committee. We are particularly sorry to be losing Phil Collins, Steve Moran and Howard Mendel; three important members of the team during the past three years.

The year ahead looks even more exciting, even more busy, and we thank you for your continuing support during the coming months.

Derek Whiteley  
Secretary

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#### EDITOR'S REPORT

As usual, this report is a mixture of progress and excuses as to why I have not managed to accomplish everything I said I would.

On the positive side, three newsletters were produced during the year, one with as bumper number of pages (the special on the Coventry Seminar). The second of these was fairly late, but that was because I was ill for several weeks during the summer. I have some material for the next issue, but as always, I would welcome more. The Index to Volume 4 is available and was produced by Kathy Way whom I forget to acknowledge on the Index itself. Progress has been made on the MANUAL OF BIOLOGICAL CURATION. Geoff Stansfield has taken over the general editor's role and the brief has been expanded substantially. The revised brief takes on board several suggestions from the Museums and Galleries Commission. Now,

with the backing of M&GC and their support we have approached HMSO to print and distribute the Manual - with every likelihood of acceptance.

Gordon Reid has been overseeing the editing and refereeing of Reg Harris' final work: ZOOLOGICAL PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION TECHNIQUES, which was received by BCG a few weeks before his death. The editing and typing is about two-thirds complete. The next step is to start applying for grant-aid towards publication.

Now come the excuses. The JOURNAL is making good progress but I regret I was not able to get any printed for the AGM. The last paper is not fully keyed into the word-processor. All the design and planning is complete and the artwork will be produced by DTP - but that isn't proving quite the godsend I expected. Disc preparation is now a major factor and takes considerable time, but this is still faster and much more flexible than conventional typesetting. The JOURNAL will be mailed with the Newsletter.

Copy for the Newsletter and papers for the Journal can now be submitted in machine readable form and details of this will be given in the Newsletter.

Two leaflets: 'ANIMAL WELFARE AND MUSEUMS' and 'DISPOSAL OF BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS' are in late stages of production and will be available shortly.

John Mathias  
Editor

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## Collections

### THE COLLECTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

A report published 1989 by the London Museum Service, compiled by Kate Arnold-Foster.

This report includes collections of all the usual disciplines: Agricultural History, Anthropology, Archaeology, Art, Biology, Geology and History of Science. It reviews the holdings of each of the Colleges; in the case of biology these include Birkbeck, Imperial, King's, Queen Mary, Royal Holloway and Bedford, and University College. Following an assessment of the range of material held in each location is a note on the current use of the collections, their care, storage, staffing, accommodation and future.

The report makes impressive, if distressing reading. Despite a current lack of use and status, a great deal of biological material remains within the college network. The following quote sums up much of what the report has to say:

'In common with university biological collections throughout the country, those that belong to the colleges of the University of London play a diminishing part in the teaching and research of their departments. Recent reorganisation of colleges and schools of the University has already affected the majority of collections. The collections of Bedford and Westfield Colleges have been dispersed and material transferred to Queen Mary and Royal Holloway and Bedford New Colleges. The original museum accommodation at Imperial College has been taken over for other purposes and the collections have been distributed around a variety of stores and laboratories. Finally a large