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papers on documentation, from Rob Huxley of the NHM and from Alan Howell of Guernsey Museum. After coffee Kate Andrew, now of Ludlow Museum, gave an informative and salutary paper on the perils and rewards of freelance conservation. She was followed by Chris Collins from the Sedgwick in Cambridge who discussed the research needs of conservation (a resume of the latter talk should appear in BC6).

Lunch led on to Ian Wallace taking us through the case for regional collection stores, and finally Paul Richards from Sheffield showed us all how truly to make a virtue of a necessity, regaling us with tales of the cornucopia of funding generated by Sheffield in novel and very laudable ways; an example to us all!

The assembled Accession of Curators then wended their various ways back to their own museums, and it only remains to thank Steve, Kathryn, Patricia, Trisha and John for a splendid meeting, a fitting milestone in the life of the BCG.

Resumes of all the talks except where noted above are presented in sequence later in this issue of *The Biology Curator*. Steve Garland's after dinner speech follows.

REMINISCENCES : SPEECH MADE AT BCG ANNIVERSARY DINNER.

The Biology Curators' Group has been in existence for 20 years now. It began in 1975 with a membership of seventy. This didn't include me as I was still struggling through University.

I thought that I would try to say a few words to you tonight about BCG and life as a curator in the 90s. I can't personally reminisce about those early years, but, out of interest I did a "where are they now" examination of the founder members!

12 are classed as whereabouts unknown.

2 are certainly dead.

21 have retired or left the profession.

13 have moved to jobs in other museums and a depressing 22 are still at the same place!

Incidentally, eight are here today. Of all these people we are most proud of the Founder Chairman 'cos its been 29 years and he's still a curator - Geoff Hancock.

If you want to be bored to tears by reminiscences and stories of olden

times then speak later to a selection of them: John Gray, Geoff Hancock, Anne Hollowell, Clem Fisher, Peter Davis, Howard Mendel, Peter Morgan and Kath Berry.

For my sins, I spent about five or six years as Chairman of this illustrious organisation. Before me came Tony from Norwich, but he had to retire after a short time due to health problems. Before Tony came Peter Morgan.

As Chairman, one major role is the chairing of committee meetings. In those days we had about six committee meetings per year. In recognition of his achievements as Chairman I would like to award Peter the empty chair award for the worst attendance by a chairman in our history - 1 out of six!

When I retired, Mike Graham took over. Mike is a really nice bloke, who had the misfortune to work at Bolton in the past - so I've heard a few stories about him, but we can go through those later over a pint. However, as Chairman, one of the other jobs is to give the group a sense of direction. In recognition of this I would like to award Mike with the Mark Thatcher navigational award for taking over an hour and a half to find his way back to the hotel on the BCG trip in Amsterdam. Or at least - that's his story.

Now BCG has fought against job cuts and has stopped the disposal of or damage to many collections. Politicians have often been seen as the major problem for curators. However, over many years working in museums I have learned that the most terrifying creature on earth is the enquiring member of the public.

No matter how common, boring or mind-numbingly dull a creature is when brought to the curator for identification, you have to dredge up something positive to say.

Oh how tempting it is to be honest! Therefore I thought I would provide a few translations of "curator speak" for the uninitiated:

Good Morning - nice to see you
means: Oh my god - not you again.

This looks unusual
means: You don't expect me to identify this do you?

It appears to have escaped
means: There's nothing here pal - you must be nuts.

What exciting creature have you brought in today?
means: If this is another bleeding elephant hawkmoth

caterpillar I'm going to remove your genitals with a rusty scalpel.

Thank you for the offer, but it falls outside our collecting policy
means: It is an elephant hawkmoth caterpillar.

I'll release it later
means: We'll have it mounted and on display by Friday.

From the other side - the enquirer doesn't always say what they mean:

I won't keep you long
means: Have I ever told you my life story.

I thought this might be useful to the museum
means: The wife says she's leaving if I don't get shut of it!

I just thought I'd pop in and see if it was of interest
means: I saw one on Antiques Roadshow - please, please, please let it be worth a fortune!

I've travelled all over the world and never EVER EVER EVER seen anything like this
means: It's an elephant hawkmoth caterpillar.

Every curator has experiences with enquiries that leave a scar on their lives:

Your first delusory parasitosis case - for those who don't know - this involves trying to get the name of someone's doctor while watching them gouge imaginary parasites out of various parts of their body - or even from passers by, with your forceps.

Trying to work out the best way to tell someone that the partly-eaten dried apricot that they have brought in is actually a sun-dried baby mouse with no head.

Trying to hold down your lunch when the bag of vacuum-cleaner contents you have been asked to examine for biting insects has just spewed a huge curly set of toe-nail clippings across your desk!

Identifying a 6 foot live snake -

Curator 1 (with book in hand) - "How many scales between the eyes?"

Curators 2 and 3 (struggling to hold down snake) - "Ten"

Curator 1 - "That narrows it down to either rat snakes or cobras"

Curators 2 and 3 - "Oh shit."

Despite the fact that its all now business plans, corporate identities and customer care policies I sincerely hope that over BCG's next twenty years there is still time for some fun.

How would life be if entomologists had to stop teasing their genitalia out; botanists could no longer create psychedelic colours with a few chemicals and a lichen collection, and taxidermists no longer mounted anything that comes their way. And

how could I ever face coming into work if I knew that I would never be reintroduced to the exciting, devastatingly interesting and unforgettable elephant hawkmoth caterpillar.

Steve Garland, Bolton Museum.

Committee News: Steve Thompson reports: Your committee has been pursuing its usual activities, supporting collections and posts at risk, organising excellent and well attended meetings, promoting training and working with other groups. However, committee itself has been having some problems, mainly due to ever-increasing workloads of its members. The last committee meeting was therefore given over principally to looking at committee and its operation, particularly at editorial issues and cell activity.

It is clear that it is very difficult for one person to handle the editorial task, and both Bill Pettitt and Mike Taylor have expressed their intention to pass the job on after the current issue. Anyway, for the last two years, it has been decided to establish a team to handle editorial work, though the team itself has to be finalised. It will take over after this issue of TBC, with its first issue to appear in mid-May.

The cell structure of committee is to remain in place, but their roles are to be more carefully defined. In addition they are to be given clearer direction by committee, will need to meet deadlines and report back, both to committee and the AGM, and more effort will be put into getting the members of the group as a whole involved, both in working in a cell, and putting information in. Details of the cells, their activities and principal contacts should be published in the May TBC.

We hope that these things will make the committee and BCG as a whole, more effective in the future. In the meantime, three people are standing down from committee at or by the AGM, Rosina Down, Mike Taylor and Bill Pettitt. Officer posts that will become vacant are Chairman and Editor. Committee will have nominees for the first two. Volunteers for committee are welcomed and encouraged. Seconded nominations to the Secretary please by 16 April.

Notice of AGM: 30 April, see Diary Dates below.

"Keeper of the Archives" !: I have been asked to act as the archivist for BCG. If you feel you have any items to add to the archive (particularly committee documents), please send them to me at the following address: Clare Valentine, Invertebrates 1 (Porifera), Department of Zoology, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD. 0171 938 9252. e-mail cv@nhm.ac.uk.

I also hold issues of the following journals that we have received in exchange for the BCG Newsletter from other societies:

Association of Systematic Collections Newsletter

Vol.20, no.5 (Oct. 1992) to date [Vol.23, no.3 (June 1995)].

(Issues up to 1991 held by John Mathias, Leicester Museum).

Special Issues:

America's Systematic Collections: A National Plan. December 1973.

Guidelines for Acquisition & Management of Biological Specimens.

A Report of the Participants of the Conference on Voucher Specimen Management. May 1992.

G.C.G Newsletter – Vol.2, no.8 (1980) to Vol.5, no.5 (1988) + Index to Vol.2 (1990). (Vol.4, nos.4,6 & 7 missing.)

Coprolite – No.11, May 1993 & No.18 Nov.1995 only.

(Some earlier issues held by Steve Garland, Bolton Museum).

Guild of Taxidermists – Volumes 23 & 24 only.

Scottish Society for Conservation & Restoration Journal – Vol.1, No.1 (Feb. 1990) to date (Vol.5, No.2)

Issues of the Bulletin & Newsletter held by John Mathias.

I also have a copy of *The Manual of Natural History Curatorship* 1995 edited by Geoff Stansfield & John Mathias that the Group was given as a review copy.

If anyone requires photocopies of any of the above, please contact me for a quote.

Natural Sciences Conservation Group: The first newsletter of the Natural Sciences Conservation Group is hot of the press and is winging its way to members. The first newsletter contains a bibliography of current articles relevant to natural sciences conservators, three articles on the Tenth Annual SPNHC Meeting and Herbarium Workshop held in Toronto this year, and a review of the

Collection Risks Assessment Workshop, organised by the Natural Sciences Conservation Group and run by the Canadian Museum of Nature, held at Museums Association Conference at Leicester University in September.

As well as members of the new Natural Sciences Conservation Group all members of the old UKIC Natural Sciences Section will also receive this first issue. If you wish to continue to receive this newsletter and you are not already a member or wish to join the new Natural Sciences Conservation Group annual subscription to the group are: UK personal £10, Overseas personal £15, UK Institutional £25 (1 set of publications plus 3 membership rate places at meetings), Overseas Institutional £35 (1 set of publications plus 3 membership rate places at meetings). Annual subscriptions will be due in April. Because the new group is forming in the middle of the year however, the first subscription fee will cover years 95/96 and 96/97, finishing in April 1997. For this period only the subscription rates will be slightly higher: UK personal, £12, Overseas personal, £18, UK Institutional, £30, Overseas Institutional, £42.

Cheques, in sterling, should be made payable to Natural Sciences Conservation Group and sent to: Kate Andrew, Natural Sciences Conservation Group, c/o Ludlow Museum, Old Street, Ludlow, Shropshire, SY8 1NW.

DIARY DATES

27-28 Mar 1996. Natural Sciences Conservation Group Annual General Meeting – Ipswich Museum. 'Preventative Conservation and Natural Sciences Collection Care'.

Papers and short talks are required. Meeting will consist of a programme of talks followed by the AGM on Wednesday 27th and an optional visit to Colchester Museum on Thursday 28th.

Speakers include: The control of acidity in formaldehyde solutions being used for the preservation of fish parasitology material – Julian Carter, Zoological Conservator, National Museum of Wales; Setting up a myco herbarium – Simon Moore, Hampshire County Museums Service; St Kilda explored – an interactive exhibition, Glasgow Museum; Keynote speaker to be announced.