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AN INDEX TO NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

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(This is the first of a series of papers on national documentation schemes to be published in preparation for the B.C.G. Conference on Biological Collections in 1977).

Revision of 'Where is the -- Collection' by C. Davies Sherborn

Summary report for 1971-1975

Following my approach to the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History for their help in producing questionnaire forms for circulation, I distributed the forms to all Museums in the U.K. that were likely to have natural history material. The major institutions in Europe and others with which I had some contact in North America and Australasia were also approached. Inevitably the response to both the circulars and the notices of the proposed revision in fourteen scientific journals, was variable. Good co-operation was given by the majority of museums in the U.K. (50%), that from the Antipodes was virtually 100%, but elsewhere the response was lukewarm.

Before proceeding with the revision, provisional clearance was obtained from Sherborn's surviving executor and also Cambridge University Press, his publishers.

The arrangements for processing the information did not materialise and I reverted to the card index system. Initially, it was possible to devote considerable time to the project, but over the past two years the time spent on preparing and processing the information has been very limited. However, I expect the situation to improve from mid-summer 1976.

The present position is that the majority of entries for the letters A-C have been prepared. It is hoped to use these to discuss lay-out and the feasibility of publication with potential publishers, before processing the remaining entries. (For comparison - Letter A entries = Sherborn - 57 Revision - 110; Letter B = Sherborn - 235 Revision - 355; All these entries are more detailed than in the original work). The biographical details need to be added for many of the remaining cards, or at least verified. Information published in journals over the past few years needs to be extracted and added to the entries.

Various developments, particularly in the geological field have a bearing on the situation. In Britain the formation of the Geological Curators Group and their independant survey is of considerable importance. In America the Palaeontographical Society is conducting an enquiry into the availability of the resources for invertebrate palaeontologists in the continent and have allocated reasonable funds for carrying out this exercise. The principal mineralogical collections of the major institutions of the work have been briefly listed in a World Directory

published by the International Mineralogical Association in 1974 and which is to be revised in 1977. The forthcoming publication of the reference work 'Natural History Auctions 1700-1972' by Mr Chalmers-Hunt in association with Messrs. Sotheby, Parke, Bernet will also have some effect and provide additional information.

However, since it is intended that the revision should be more comprehensive than any of these ventures, I feel that the project is worth pursuing. Many of the staff of the British Museum (Natural History) and their research visitors appreciate the value of the information accumulated to date and regard it as a worthwhile research tool. Lack of time is the only drawback to such data being generally available.

Appended to this report is a copy of the original letter sent out to Museums and an example of two of the entries. Information for the Revision is strongest for Palaeontological and Recent Mollusca collections.

References

There was a review of similar schemes in Museums Assistant Group News April 1973.

The format of the revision will be something like the compilation produced by American Malacologists, edited by Tucker Abbot, 1973.

SOCIETY FOR THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NATURAL HISTORY

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INDEX TO NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

Where is the ----- Collection? By C. Davies Sherborn, D. Sc.,
Cambridge University Press, 1940:141.

This catalogue, published in 1940, contains about 1,700 entries that give the whereabouts of past natural history collections and, in some cases, a brief account of their history. Its compiler, C. Davies Sherborn an eminent bibliographer, made a significant contribution to scientific literature through the reference works he produced e.g. Index Animalium, 1758-1850 and his painstaking labours in establishing publication dates of important works. In the course of these duties, he amassed details relating to the older collections concerned and subsequently, by diligent searching in miscellaneous records, sales catalogues and popular journals he was able to augment his notes so that they would provide a useful reference guide for systematists. Sherborn recognized that this catalogue was far from complete, but his reviewers, while praising his intentions, criticized its contents and particularly mentioned the omission of many famous collections housed in the major museums and institutions of Great Britain.

It is felt that a complete revision of this reference book would be of value to many taxonomists, both zoological and palaeontological, and others interested in the history of the natural sciences. In addition to rectifying incomplete and inaccurate entries, including the important omissions mentioned by critics and incorporating information on the later history and present whereabouts of the collections listed by Sherborn, entries concerning more recent collections will be provided, particularly those appertaining to branches of the natural sciences that have developed since 1940. It is also intended to widen the scope of the catalogue, although retaining its essentially British and European coverage, by mentioning important material available in scientific institutions throughout the world. However, information on botanical collections will not be included since this field is thoroughly covered in the Index Herbariorum. The inclusion of further biographical details of the collectors and information on hand-writing and portrait collections, together with a complete bibliography, should also increase the value of this catalogue as a reference tool.

Initially, the reference resources of the various libraries in the British Museum (Natural History) and the knowledge of the Museum's scientific staff will be used to compile this revision, but it is hoped that many others will be prepared and encouraged to collaborate in providing details of collections and collectors.

Any information that will be of value to the project should be addressed to, either Mr. A. Wheeler, Secretary, Society for the Bibliography of Natural History; or, Mr. R. J. Cleevely, Dept. of Palaeontology, both at the British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD, England.

ABBOTT, WILLIAM JAMES LEWIS (1853. - 3.viii. 1933)

Collected fossil vertebrates & non-marine molluscs.

A large part of his collection, including Ingress Vale material, was bought by the Geological Survey Museum in 1927 and is there now.

Pleistocene non-marine molluscs from Whitehall (1890-92) presented to B.M.(N.H.) in 1901 ; Pleistocene vertebrates from Igtham bought by Sir H.H. Howorth and presented to B.M.(N.H.) --- (these were described by Newton, Q.J.G.S., 50, 1894).

Flint implements from Hastings Castle purchased by the Wellcome Museum, 1930

Some MSS material in the Palaeontology Library of the B.M.(N.H.)

London

Obit. : Q. Jl. geol. Soc., 90, 1934: 1 - 11

Proc. geol. Ass., 45, 1934:97

Fossil Mamm.; Moll.

ALDER, Joshua (1792-1867)

His collections in the Hancock Museum, Newcastle-on-Tyne; the British nudibranchs had deteriorated (1965) but were being treated and re-housed. Some shells in the B.M.(N.H.).

In 1974, Dr. A.P. Nimmo reported that this material was in good condition.

Biogr. : see E.L. Gill, 1908 , ' The Hancock Museum and its History ', Appendix to the Trans. nat. Hist. Soc. Northumb., N.S., 2, 1908 : xi-xli , portr. sketch.

MS. notebook relating to Brit. Nudibranchiate Mollusca (c. 1835-64) in BM(NH)

Embleton, D. 1867. Notice on the life of the late Joshua Alder, Esq. Nat. Hist. Trans. Northumb. 1 : 324-337.

Goddard, T.R. 1929. In 'History of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham & Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1827-1927.

See also Cornelius, P. (In Press). 'Revisionary notes on the coelenterate taxa of Joshua Alder (1792-1867)'. Bull. Br. Mus. nat. Hist., Zool.

Moll.