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A NOTE ON THE NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTION, LEEDS CITY MUSEUM

HISTORICAL

The Museum was founded in 1821 by the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society when the Society's private collections were opened to the public. From the 1821 Annual Report it can be seen that amongst the early exhibits there was a collection of British Birds and Quadrupeds - a gift of Mr. John Atkinson. During the century the collection grew and developed in relation to the members' interests and their generosity in making donations or raising money in subscription funds to purchase specimens or collections. In 1921, by legal agreement, the management of the Society's Museum was transferred to the Corporation of Leeds and it became the Leeds City Museum.

In 1941, the Museum building in Park Row was badly damaged by a German bomb which fell through the Natural History Galleries and the storage area. Besides the destruction of part of the collections, many of the detailed Natural History records were lost. Considerable damage was caused to the foundations of the building, which eventually led to its closure and the removal of the collections and displays to their present home in Municipal Buildings. Since Local Government reorganisation in 1974, the Museum has been a division of the Leisure Services Department.

NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

In 1825 the Council of the Philosophical and Literary Society decided to appoint a sub-curator on a salary of £80 per annum, and his duties were specified as 'to arrange the Museum under the direction of the Curator, to accumulate, preserve and label subjects in Natural History in order to render the collections not a resort for the gratification of curiosity but a valuable school of instruction'. Mr. Henry Denny was appointed and served the Society for 45 years. Under Denny the Natural History collections were increased and developed to include not only local and British material, but also foreign specimens, e.g. a large collection of marine animals from the Zoological Station in Naples. Unfortunately, much of the pre-second World War material was destroyed by the bomb in 1941. To protect some of the more valuable scientific material from further damage, such collections as the W. D. Hinks' Amazonian Dragonflies and various other type and figured specimens were donated to the British Museum (Natural History). Some material was also passed to other museums, notably Manchester Museum.

In 1952, Mr. John Armitage was appointed Keeper of Natural History and had the task of examining and sorting the war-damaged collections. Much of these collections proved to be in very bad condition,

being either smashed, or infested so that many items had to be destroyed. However, parts of the collection were salvaged, e.g. most of the insects from the Dibb and Hinks Collection, various mammals, parts of the bone collection, and most of the bird skins and mounts. The latter included the collection of Sir William Milner which contains many rare birds taken in Yorkshire, Britain and throughout Europe. The main collections of the Leeds City Museum have been acquired since 1945.

In 1946, G. R. Dent presented the Museum with a cabinet of eggs from the W. Schluter Collection of Halle, which was combined with the T. G. Roper collection in 1947. Various other egg collections, including those of Geo. C. Cayley and F. H. Woodhouse, were acquired in the early fifties as a result of the Bird Protection Act.

With the assistance of local entomologists and, in particular, John F. Flint, a comprehensive collection of British Beetles was accumulated. This, together with some Dibb and Hink material, and the Curculionides from the C. D. Day collection (acquired in 1960), now forms the basis of the beetle collections.

To build up the collections, the Museum made various appeals which resulted in the donation or purchase of specimens ranging from single items to large collections such as the Wilding Collection of British Butterflies and the Thornton collection of British Moths. In recent years the acquisitions have been orientated towards smaller collections of items such as Fish Otoliths and Woodlice. However, the following large collections have also been acquired - the L. W. Stratton Shell Collections, 263 mounted birds from Swindon Museum, and the Herbaria of James Abbott, F. W. Barnett, C. W. Horrell and Dr. George Nelson.

At present the department is investigating the historical collections and transferring these and other records onto the MDA system. In addition to this work, the collections are being enlarged as and when material is available, through purchase or donation, and by limited fieldwork.

COLLECTIONS

As the collections are still under investigation, the following information is provided to identify the major collections held at Leeds. This is in a general form and it is proposed that a definitive list, with collector information, will be published when this work has been completed.

SYNOPSIS OF THE COLLECTIONS OF LEEDS CITY MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY)

Botany

The oldest herbarium is that of the Rev. William Wood

(1745-1808) presented to the Museum by the Linnean Society in September 1949. Most of the collections are of more recent origins and include those of James Abbott, F. Barnett, C. W. Horrell, K. G. Payne and George Nelson.

The Collection also includes marine algae collected by R. Hudson-Pope, as well as seeds and a series of freeze-dried fungi.

Zoology -

Mammals

The only specific collection of mammals is the Whittaker Collection of Yorkshire Bats, but the mammal collections are represented by material from all parts of the world.

Birds

The main skin collections were assembled by Sir William Milner in the latter part of the 19th century and these have been increased by gifts and purchases up to the present time. Two large collections of mounted birds were acquired in the early 1960's which contain many rare and some extinct species and extending the importance of the collection to cover material from all over the world.

Skins, Mounts and Eggs

Sir William Milner
W. B. Arundel
J. C. Hirst
J. Todd

G. R. Dent
G. C. Cayley
C. E. Rhodes
J. G. Roper

Fish and Lower Vertebrates

The collections contain small numbers of fish, amphibia and reptiles, both as models and mounts, but in recent years attempts have been made to build up these collections in a spirit form.

Invertebrates

Lepidoptera

The most important collections are those of

Benson-Jowett who collected material from all over the world. Also of importance is the Wilding Collection of butterflies which must rate as one of the finest preserved collections available.

R. Benson-Jowett
R. Thornton
Dr. J. L. Wigan
Peter Stocks
H. Shann

R. Wilding
Sir W. Garforth
Fredk Buckton
Wing-Cdr. J. M. Maucler

Coleoptera

Most of the beetles in the Museum Collections were collected by the staff of the Museum with the aid of local entomologists, but they also include the collections of D. Day, Dibb and Hinks.

Other Insects

Most groups of insects are represented in the Museum collections. Some, however, are only poorly represented. The collections of Odonata and Diptera are fairly strong in sections, particularly the Tipulids and the Syrphids in the Diptera collections.

T. R. Dibb (Part) W. D. Hinks (Part) D. Day

Note The collections of Dibb and Hinks and D. Day contain specimens from more than one group of insects.

Mollusca

The Mollusca Collections are built up from a large number of individual collections covering most groups from all parts of the world. By far the most important of these collections is that of Sylvanus Charles Thorpe Hanley an expert taxonomist and author of many books on Conchology. This collection contains many types and important figured specimens. A present study of the freshwater bivalves has produced a number of important discoveries which are at present in the process of being published.

Sylvanus Charles Thorpe Hanley
Atkinson Memorial Collection

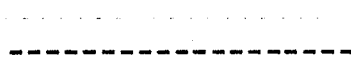
A. G. Stubbs
William Nelson
Charles Ashford
Hugh Brooksbank
L. W. Stratton (Part)

Other Invertebrates

Over the past few years an attempt has been made to build up collections of invertebrates, in particular the woodlice, centipedes and millipedes, and examples of most of the common and some of the rare species are now in the collection. The Museum also has small collections of brachiopods and corals, as well as some of the smaller lesser known groups of invertebrates.

A. J. Rundle

J. H. Nunney
A. Norris



THE HERBARIUM AT AMPLEFORTH COLLEGE, YORK

This collection was passed on to me when I took over the Department a few years ago but apart from immediate first aid (removing a nest of mice) it is only recently that I have been able to put in some elementary curating. All specimens have been catalogued using Clapham et al. and arranged accordingly. Many of the older specimens have deteriorated considerably but they have been retained together with their data. Unfortunately there are a number of specimens lacking any data.

The main collection consists of 1,570 specimens of Pteridophyta, Gymnospermae, and Angiospermae. This collection can be divided into three main groups:

Collection made in 1835/36 probably by two collectors as yet unidentified (I may be able to trace one in time). Most of these have localities and in some cases more ecological data. It is going to be some time however before detailed localities can be traced since often local names of areas are used.