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FURTHER TO THE NATIONAL BUTTERFLY MUSEUM
SALE
F.R.Woodward

I noted with interest Steve Garland's comments on the recent sale of the National Butterfly Museum (formerly the Saruman Museum) by Sotheby's on 26 and 27 October 1983 and would like to make the following corrections and observations.

Firstly the sale did not take place in London but at St Mary's, Bramber, near Steyning, West Sussex, perhaps helping to explain the small number of public museums represented at the sale.

Secondly, I was not in the least surprised that most lots achieved sale prices far in excess of those estimated since a) the auctioneers were dealing with an unknown situation since specialist entomological sales of this kind have not taken place since at least the Second World War. (The Smart family World Butterfly Collection had previously been offered for sale by the National Butterfly Museum at Christie's South Kensington Salerooms on Friday 23 July 1982 at which sale Glasgow Museum purchased two ten drawer cabinets of lycaenids. The majority of the collection, however, was bought in by the Smart Family.)

b) Many of the entomological items were in first class condition, well documented or historically important

c) Auction fever played a part in that some lots were snapped up by locals purely as mementoes without any regard for true value? Similarly some books fetched higher prices than new copies currently on sale in most booksellers.

Regarding the reference to archival material, this is presumably to Lot 468 'The Siviter-Smith Papers', including an enormous correspondence over some twenty years between P. Siviter-Smith and virtually all leading entomologists of his day. Particularly interesting is the great contribution by H.A. Leeds with much unpublished material relative to "Copper" butterflies. Note books, photographs, drawings, etc, included show that Siviter-Smith intended to publish a substantial monograph. (Estimated price £20-£30.) This lot fetched £320 plus commission, but reflects the highly important scientific content of the lot and was, I understand, purchased by an entomologist currently undertaking a monographic revision of the *Lycaenidae* (Coppers and allies).

The walnut-faced fifteen-drawer cabinet refers to lot 995, The Gurney Cabinet, a mahogany and walnut fifteen-drawer entomological specimen cabinet by the famous maker T Gurney circa 1900. This contained the Smart British Butterfly Collection.

"Apart from a very few typical specimens the collection consists entirely of historic or aberrational forms spanning the last two hundred years. No attempt to detail this in what follows has been made - to select any insects for special mention at the expense of others would be a pointless exercise. It is sufficient to say that this is the most important assemblage of British material outside the British Museum (Nat Hist) and includes many forms unrepresented, or less completely so, in that institution.

Many of the specimens are well-known having passed through such famous

collections as those of Bright, Frohawk, Gainsford, Marcon, Turner, etc, a high proportion being the actual specimens figured in the standard works of South, Frohawk, Barrett, Howarth, Russwurm, etc. In total upwards of two-and-a-half thousand specimens - almost all in some way unique."

This lot fetched £11,000 plus buyers premium through a phone bid by a purchaser said at the sale to have been phoning direct from Japan. Professionally, however I regret that this scientifically and historic material passed once more into private hands with the eventual possibility of its being dispersed and leaving the British Isles since the material concerned has considerable British significance.

This brings me to the two interesting aspects of the sale from a museum viewpoint; firstly the star billing of type specimens. I see no disadvantages inherent in cataloguing such material in future natural history sales but question the attitude of museums in general to such occurrences.

How many museums, with the exception of the British Museum (Natural History), Brighton Museum, Dundee City Museum, or ourselves at Glasgow, took any active interest in the sale, or indeed what has been the attitude of the museum profession, with the exception of the B C G article to the sale?

This I realise is due to a series of factors such as individual collecting policies being restricted to definite limited areas; lack of specialist entomologists, reluctance to purchase Natural History material which in the past has been donated free of charge in contrast to our art collections.

However, I personally would argue that we also have a responsibility as representatives of public institutions to ensure that Natural History material of significant historical or scientific importance should, if at all possible, be taken into public ownership under our care to ensure its safety for future generations of scientists and public alike. Surely much of the material included in the present sale came within this category.

As regards the sale of types I accept that this tended to inflate prices in certain instances in the present case but what is the monetary value of safeguarding a primary type? This was offset by the ludicrous prices paid for some lots, as for example Lot 650 Garden butterflies, which fetched £540 plus buyers premium and seriously made me wonder why museum personnel have never considered setting up in business by themselves.

Regardless of the rights or wrongs, I purchased some nineteen lots containing type material of Lepidoptera together with further lots of foreign lepidoptera including many figured by Paul Smart, FRES in The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of the Butterfly World published in 1975. I also purchased the G R Sutton Collection of British Beetles, the Dr R M P Clark Collection of British Beetles and the H D Smart Collection of British Hymenoptera. In addition we purchased Lot 1005, "Specimens from two further expeditions sponsored by the museum, one to the 'Lost World' of Roraima in South America, the other that of Aberdeen University to Papua, New Guinea" (estimated price £70-£90).

This scientifically important material with strong Scottish connections was purchased for £40. This raises a further question, namely the attitude of and relationship between, museums, public bodies, such as universities or private individuals, carrying out scientific or taxonomic research. It seems a terrible misuse of available limited resources in these days of financial stringencies to waste valuable material, often obtained at high cost, through lack of coordination or foresight. Serious consideration should be given by us all, both museums and scientific organisations alike, to the future deposition of any expeditionary, experimental, or voucher material during the initial planning stages of all research projects. In the case of type material this is now partially covered by the recommendation of the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature requesting that types should, if at all possible, be deposited in a public institution.

In regard to Steve's second point, namely the note concerning trade in protected species I personally have no doubt whatsoever that such additions provide a strong inducement to buyers to purchase a given lot. However, note the wording under 2 'any such specimens of butterflies, moths etc contained within the lots offered for sale are deemed not to form part of that lot for sale purposes or valuation, such specimens being regarded in the nature of a gift by the museum to any other museum, or responsible individual who shall purchase any such lot'. The important point is 'a gift by the museum to any other museum, or responsible individual who shall purchase any such lot'.

At the sale the auctioneer made it quite clear that any such lots sold were subject to Department of the Environment regulations. For example, lot 1003 'Melanism as illustrated by the Peppered Moth Biston betularia.

The display consists of specimens drawn from the late Dr H D B Kettlewell's research material including most of the actual specimens figured in his famous paper in the Journal of Genetics, the paper models he made to test bird reaction and one of the original Hope Department boxes which contained part of the betularia material'. The purchaser of this lot required DOE clearance and registration thus helping to ensure that the material did not leave Britain and that its future location could be monitored.

In regard to the use of the words National and Museum I understand Steve's point but we should remember that all Public Museums owe their origin to Private collections or 'museums' thus the British Museum (Natural History) originated from those of Sir Hans Sloane, Joseph Banks, etc the Hunterian at Glasgow University from that of Dr William Hunter and that of the Royal College of Surgeons from Dr John Hunter.

The effect the sale has had on our public image is hopefully minimal but again brings home the point what have we or the Museums Association done to correct any misapprehension in the mind of the general public?

Finally as regards the fate of the other lots I understand many of the remaining type lots were purchased by the Allyn Museum of Entomology at Sarasoto, Florida, USA, Dundee Museum purchased some British material whilst Brighton museum obtained several of the Nymphalids to supplement their extensive collections of this group. As to the remaining lots many were purchased by individual specialists in the various groups thus at least, ensuring their survival for the foreseeable future.

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