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Author(s): Seddon, B. A.

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Letters

City of Birmingham

CITY MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERY

Birmingham, B3 3DH.

Telephone 021-235 9944

Michael Diamond MA, FMA
Director

The Editor,
B C G Newsletter,
Sheffield City Museum,
Weston Park,
SHEFFIELD S10 2TP

your ref
our ref
date
telephone calls to
direct line 021-235

26th April 1984

Dear Sir,

BIG BRUM'S CLANGER

For those readers fortunate enough not to know the city, I should explain that the ediface erected in 1885 as a Museum & Art Gallery is surmounted by a prominent clock-tower known as Big Brum, Birmingham's proud answer to Westminster's Big Ben. The clanger refers of course to the striker which sounds the great bell to mark the hours for those who labour in the museum below.

Events have not stood still in this busy place since last issue of the Newsletter, in which your correspondent was flattered by an unsolicited testimonial from Michael Diamond. Unfortunately for him and for me also, the "substantial extra space" allocated to the Natural History Department which he referred to in his letter is soon to be taken from us by he who giveth (the Chief Executive). This results from a directive by the city's General Purposes Committee that "prime office space" (including that within the Museum) should not be used for storage (i.e. housing the collections). My only consolation in this predicament is the knowledge that I saw the possibility of this happening long before the Authority conceived its present policy (see my letter in BCG News vol 2, no 4, p117-8 of September 1979).

The Natural History Department just happens to occupy the offices selected for the city's Development & Promotion Officer. We are expected to vacate our 4,500 sq ft of offices, laboratories, work-rooms and collections by end of July. As a party of council members toured the accommodation, one was heard to remark "We have waited 25 years to get hold of this". It leaves one wondering why Birmingham deserves a Museum! The Department has occupied these rooms for less than 7 years and for the first time they provided an adequate environment for conserving and developing collections of national significance (see item on the STONE Herbarium in this Newsletter). I should not bet on retaining equivalent conditions when the next move is accomplished.

Yours faithfully,

Brian Abell Seddon
Keeper (Natural History)