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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Editor's report

The change in format of the Newsletter initially took a considerable time to organise, at a time when I was heavily involved in exhibition work, and volume 4 part 5 was very late in distribution. Part 6 followed after a more acceptable interval, but I am still behind on the publication schedule; I apologise for this and will try to rectify it in the coming year.

I hope the new style meets with approval from members. The retyping of articles and photo-reduction of typescripts means we are now using space more efficiently, and printing by offset litho gives a much more polished product. The Newsletter is now close to the standard I was hoping to achieve at the beginning of the year and I think it has improved the image of the group both to the public and within the profession.

The changes have not proved expensive. Production costs of the new style Newsletters are significantly less than those of their photocopied predecessors.

It is traditional at this time of year for editors to appeal for copy and I am no exception. Style can be arranged by the editor, but content is very much in the hands of the members. I need contributions from as broad a section of the membership as is possible and as regularly as possible; even single paragraphs are welcome. The production method now used for the Newsletter allows photographs and illustrations to be printed to a high standard and I would particularly appreciate illustrated contributions or illustrations which can be used in their own right.

The leaflets for the proposed Journal of Biological Curation are currently being produced and will be distributed with the next Newsletter. They will be self explanatory when they arrive so there is no need to go into details now. I just want to say that the Journal should be seen in conjunction with the Newsletter and Special Report Series as providing a broad publication base for the Group so that any length or 'weight' (if that is the correct term) of manuscript submitted can be published in the most appropriate format.

The Manual of Curatorship project started with a meeting of the organising sub-committee; an outline now has to be fleshed out so that outside organisations can be approached for grants or sponsorship towards production costs.

John Mathias
Editor

AGM 87

Report of the Working Party on Natural Sciences Collection Resources (The Bernice Williams Report)

Background

The Working Party on Natural Science Resources began life in June 1981 as the Working Party on Taxonomy under the chairmanship of Janet Chamberlain. It had been convened following papers by Phil Doughty and Geoff Hancock on the state of natural science collections at the 1980 Museums Association Conference, and following promptings from the Museums and Galleries Commission who had asked for various facts on natural science collections in the UK which neither the Museums Association nor BCG had been able to supply. Geologists had the Phil Doughty survey and report to quote; biologists clearly needed a similar in-depth survey.

At its first meeting in June 1981 the appointed group changed its title to 'Working Party on Natural Science Collection Resources' and its aims were reported in the MA Bulletin: to identify all natural science collections in the UK and to seek funds to appoint a specialist to achieve that end; to explore how collections gathered in the process of research could be assimilated into public institutions.

Official indications of progress then seem to dwindle. The Working Party is mentioned in the 1982 MA Yearbook and again in 1983 at which time a new chairman was named, Fred Dunning, and there were one or two changes to the composition of the group.

Dr Bernice Williams was appointed to gather the facts and in 1983 she sent out a substantial questionnaire to all museums and other institutions thought to hold collections. The replies were collated into a draft report and circulated to Working Party members and one or two others something over a year ago.

The BCG Committee for some time has been concerned over the lengthy delay between the deadline for questionnaire receipts (January 1984) and production of the final report - despite the fact that Peter Morgan reviewed its findings at the 1986 Museums Association Conference (reported in Museums Journal vol 86 no 3). The data it contains are now at least three and a half years out of date. Some BCG members have also expressed reservations about certain parts of the report, so a discussion on it was scheduled for the 1987 BCG AGM meeting in Sheffield at which all views could be aired and an initiative to the Chairman of the Working Party could be formulated.

The following is an attempted summary of a very wide-ranging discussion.