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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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prompt any other museums holding such collections to write to Liverpool Museum for a questionnaire. The results will be summarised in a later issue of the BCG NEWSLETTER. It will be some time before another edition of INDEX XYLARIORUM is prepared, and if this exercise helps to dispel the impression that Britain has only nine institutional wood collections, it will have been worthwhile.

John Edmondson
Keeper of Botany, Liverpool Museum

Museum development in Buckinghamshire

As Museums Year gets under way, Buckinghamshire County Museum is marking the occasion in what at first sight seems a very perverse way. On 31st March we are closing most of the museum building to the public.

That the two events should coincide was not a deliberate choice on our part. Circumstances have forced the timing on us; if we do not move out of the premises soon to allow renovation work then we will have to be evacuated before too long anyway.

The County Museum is situated in an attractive old quarter of Aylesbury and occupies a group of buildings dating from the fifteenth through to the nineteenth century. A recent structural survey showed serious defects in the fabric of the buildings. A considerable amount of money needs to be spent to restore them to meet the terms of the County Council's lease from Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. The option of carrying out restoration work in stages so that the museum could remain open was considered to be too impractical and potentially harmful to the collections. Reluctantly, we have had to accept the prospect of moving staff, fittings and one hundred thousand objects to a temporary home for some three and a half years while the structural repairs are carried out.

A positive side to all this upheaval is the opportunity it presents to take stock of the museum's assets and to make a radical plan for the future. It allows us a virtual clean sweep of the displays. We have the chance to install modern galleries around a coherent display policy instead of having to change things in a piecemeal way. This will of course require large sums of money in addition to the one million pounds which may have to be spent on building renovation. We have no illusions about this being available from the County Council's budget. Much of it may have to come from grant-aid and business sponsorship.

Not all of the museum galleries will be closed on 31st March. The recently fitted 'Aylesbury Gallery' and Temporary Exhibition gallery will remain open to the public throughout the closure period. At our temporary premises six miles away in Halton, the museum service should resume some sort of

normality after recovering from the move itself. Visitors and enquirers will still be welcome to come and consult the staff and to make use of the collections. The Department of Biology and Geology is shortly to gain a 100% staff increase in the form of an Environmental Records Assistant, which will free the Keeper of Biology and Geology to carry out more work on the collections and to prepare for the new galleries. We hope to keep a high profile in the local community by setting up travelling displays, organising special events, and distributing a regular newsletter.

Buckinghamshire County Museum has received a lot of attention during the past year. Soon after Colin Dawes was appointed as County Museums Officer (to succeed the retiring Curator, Christopher Gowing) he was asked to undertake a major appraisal of the Museum Service. This comprehensive survey was presented to the Library and Museum Sub-Committee in December last year. Running almost concurrently with this was an exercise by the Area Museums Service for South Eastern England called the 'Aylesbury Special Project' (nicknamed the 'White Tornado'). AMSSEE allocated £10,000 grant-aid towards a series of seminars and advisory visits by specialists, concentrating on Buckinghamshire County Museum's problems and making suggestions for ways forward. AMSSEE's main report did not pull any punches and it was no surprise to be told that there was a great deal of work to be done on the natural history collections. Ancillary reports by specialist advisors did contain much constructive and detailed advice on how to improve matters in the short and long term. With an extra member of staff for Biology and Geology there is actually a chance that significant improvements can be made while we are at Halton.

One way or another the staff at Buckinghamshire County Museum have had a traumatic year, with the big migration still to come. No doubt there will be new developments to report in future issues of the BCG Newsletter once we have all got over our shell shock. Watch this space!

Kate Rowland
Keeper of Biology and Geology
Buckinghamshire County Museum

Free to a good home!
(Genuine offers only considered)

Disembowelled Red Deer, complete with guts cast in resin and tastefully painted arrow hole. Reclining on side, good set of antlers. Previously used in a display showing prehistoric hunting techniques.

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