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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Letters

Dear John,

Along with a number of museums nationally, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery is attempting to come to grips with its large and diverse insect collections. At present the majority are housed in a variety of entomological cabinets of differing age and quality. In order to improve access to specimens, and to relieve problems of documentation and conservation, all are being transferred into uniform, purpose-built storage. This consists of Stephenson Blake units; Hill-style drawers, but in-house design carcasses.

Recently concern has been expressed within our section over ordering a product which contains a significant percentage of tropical hardwood, notably mahogany. Although the amount of timber is relatively small, we wonder if anyone has investigated whether their own suppliers utilise a renewable source of hardwood or whether possible alternatives such as beech have been tried.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Barnett
Assistant Curator, Natural History,
Museum and Art Gallery, Queens Road,
Bristol BS8 1RL.

Dear Derek,

I am writing to thank you for the support that BCG gave to the Museums Matter campaign last year, and in particular, over the then frozen Museums Officer (Natural Sciences) post.

It is with some delight that I can tell you that we are interviewing candidates for this post on 13th June. I have refrained from writing before as there has been some problem with funding the full complement of posts that was recently advertised - happily for us, the Natural Sciences post seems safe.

I should point out that despite this success, the Service has still lost a number of posts this year through a voluntary severance scheme and non-filling of vacant posts. Nevertheless, at least the Natural Sciences section will return to its complement of three and I honestly feel that this is largely due to the level of support that we received from BCG and other scientific organisations, along with the publication of the Biology Collections UK report (which we were able to use as ammunition throughout).

In conclusion, may I thank you and the BCG Committee once again for your support and indeed, other BCG members who wrote in defence of the Service.

Yours sincerely,

Alec Coles
NALGO (City of Newcastle Branch)

OLDHAM LIVES!

Oldham has a natural history department once again. Simon Hayhow has been appointed Keeper (Natural History) and has been joined by Jane Mee as Exhibitions Officer (Natural History). This follows a gap of nine years since the retirement of Leonard Kidd in 1981. Both are based at the Local Interest Museum, Greaves Street, Oldham (061 678 4649). At present there is a lack of available exhibition space but displays and activities are planned for country park visitors' centres and other local venues from February 1990. For further details of the museum's history and collections see volume 1 of the Journal of Biological Curation.

The new staff would be interested to hear of any specimens with Oldham associations held by other institutions and would also like to thank the BCG for their concern about the collections and support for re-establishing the department.

Simon Hayhow and Jane Mee
Oldham Museum

HARDING'S MICRODISSECTOR

I have recently acquired one of these dissectors, manufactured about 25 years ago by Langear Ltd. I have been told to use fine tungsten wire for the 'scalpels', and that to sharpen it one dips the end into a bath of a molten salt, which burns the end to a very fine point. Unfortunately my informant cannot recall the composition of the salt used in the bath - does anyone out there know? Also does anyone know where to get the fine tungsten wire, or whether the apparatus is still available anywhere?

Charles Pettitt
Manchester Museum, The University,
Manchester M13 9PL

REMINDER

1990 subs now due
