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## The Biology Curator

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the Leeds City Museums lichen collection. The bulk of the collection was the work of Peter Earland-Bennett with the help of Paul Stewart his assistant. The vast majority of specimens within the collection were identified and carded to M.D.A. standard. However, many thousands of specimens are still awaiting packaging and identification. The Isle of Man material which remained unidentified has been loaned back to Peter Earland-Bennett to enable him to complete his work on this material for a lichen flora of the Isle of Man. It is hoped that the other unidentified material will be worked on in the near future. In 1990 we also acquired a collection of 300 specimens in the form of an exciccata from Alan Fryday.

The lichen collections although mainly from British locations, also includes overseas material. Samples included within the collections come from as far afield as Hong Kong. Much of the identification of the overseas material, and a good deal of the British, has been undertaken by Mr Albert Henderson of Leeds University. Without who's help and encouragement, we would not have been able to cope with the collection.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Institute of Anatomical Science

### Museum Specimen 'Rescue' Scheme — Update

At the 1992 Annual General Meeting concern was expressed about the state of Pathology Museums in the UK. It was reported that in some parts of the country as many as 70% of the museums faced closure with the resultant destruction of the collections and the loss of many potentially good teaching specimens that could be used by other establishments. Many of the museums were founded in earlier centuries; indeed some of the specimens were considered to be irreplaceable.

The meeting proposed that the treasurer should write on behalf of the institute to every Pathology Museum in the country to enquire if they intend to dispose of all or part of their collection, and if so to ask if they would be prepared to notify him. He arranged to have any available specimens (with or without documentation) collected and brought to a distribution centre in Nottingham where they could be assessed, renovated and catalogued. A list of available material would then be sent to all Medical Schools who had expressed interest and the specimens given free of charge to any bona fide Pathology or Anatomy museum to fill gaps in their own collections. In this way it was hoped that we could preserve many of the older specimens, often showing pathology that is rarely seen today, while helping those schools who still use such museum pots in their teaching.

When we commenced the "rescue scheme" it became clear that this would be a major undertaking. We considered this work to be very important and the treasurer wrote to the Wellcome Trust to see if we could gain funding to assist in running the scheme and they generously awarded a grant of over £42,500 to cover the cost of consumables for three years and the salary for a technician to be employed on the renovation of all specimens. During the period of the grant over 4,000 specimens were received which was in line with our prediction. Specimens have been received from all over the UK and the numbers of donated specimens ranged from three specimens from the Royal Air Force Forensic Museum to over 1,000 from University College Hospital Medical School. Of all the specimens received only two were judged to be beyond restoration. Most specimens arrived without any documentation and meetings were arranged where pathologists met to put macro diagnoses to them. When the specimens had been renovated they were dispatched via a carrier to bona fide establishments who had expressed interest in receiving them. In the original proposal it was expected that these would be established museums, and although several museums have been recipients much of the available material has gone to form the nucleus of five entirely new teaching museums for use by both undergraduate and post graduate students.

All of these museums will continue to receive specimens as suitable material becomes available. In the last three years we have also been able to help organisations such as Oxford University to restore their pathology museum which had suffered through lack of experienced qualified staff. Specimens continue to be donated and the rescue scheme is judged to have been such a success that we are continuing



with the work which we now hope to finance ourselves or by finding other sponsors. We are currently exploring the possibility of establishing an entirely new museum in the Republic of Ireland.

If you are interested in this scheme please contact: John Ben L.I.A.S. Tel: 0115 9709076. Fax: 0115 9704852. E-Mail: John.Ben.@nott.ac.uk.

### Natural Sciences Curatorial Course

Leicester University Department of Museum Studies  
Summer 1996

*Course leader:* Simon Knell

*Tutors:* Derek Lott, Jan Dawson, John Martin, Grace Deeks

#### Outline of course

The course examined the role of the museum natural scientist in the museum environment. Those attending came from a diverse range of backgrounds ranging from full time students on Leicester University's Museum Studies Course to occasional students, from home and abroad.

The course aimed to have a practical emphasis, to be of the greatest use to those about to embark on careers in the natural science museum environment and was structured into the following six units:

- Historical and contemporary context
- Collecting and recording
- Preservation and preparation
- Identification and enquiries
- Conservation and collection management
- Systematics, taxonomy and nomenclature

A course pack for the week was provided, which contained introductions to the modules and the specific learning objectives of each, as well as a bibliography of useful texts and, where copyright permitted, specific articles of interest.

In accordance with the practical nature of the course there were very few formal lecture sessions beyond the introductory 'Historical and Contemporary Context' unit. This module explored the origin and context of natural science collections and examined current strategies for such collections and the specialist expertise needed to fulfil these roles.

The second unit looked at the role of museums in collecting natural history specimens, methods of collection and standards for recording, in line with national and local strategies. Included in this was the legal and ethical constraints of collecting.

Following on from this was an exploration of the methods of preservation for biological and zoological collections and the implications of using each technique upon the subsequent research use of the collections.

Identification of specimens and enquiries is an important component of curatorial work, so unit four was given over to this. Obviously it would take lifetime to be able to identify all the enquiries that may be brought in, however the basics

of identification of common groups of specimens was explored and there was plenty of opportunity for practice.

There are issues in collection management and conservation of collections that are specific to natural history collections. These were scrutinised and specific examples such as labelling, types of containers, mounting and hazards both to and from collections were addressed.

The course was, as previously mentioned, as practical as possible. During the week visits were undertaken to Leicestershire's Biological Records Centre, and to the various natural science departments of Leicestershire Museum Service. Field work was also conducted in some of Leicestershire's nature reserves, as well as a successful, and a somewhat less successful, batwatching trip to Foxton Locks and Barrow Upon Soar respectively. Thursday involved a terrific field visit to Dove Dale to view and identify the fabulous range of flora and, to a lesser extent, fauna of the area.

#### Personal perspective

I found the course and the supporting material extremely useful. Like the other modules that make up Leicester University's Museum Studies course, this is not intended to spoon feed those attending, but to encourage professional self-development, both during and after the course.

For me the course broadened and consolidated my image of natural science in museums. Coming from a largely geological background it gave me a valuable insight into the nuts and bolts of biological curatorship. I was surprised how much of it appears to be common sense identification and diligent recording, just as with the earth sciences. I feel the eclectic mix of participants also added a lot by providing a broad base of current experience and a lot of fun. Hopefully these contacts will continue for many years to come. Finally the course literature gave useful leads to papers and articles on the current 'best practice'. Wisely the course restricted itself to curatorial activities rather than attempting a dangerously shallow introduction to conservation, other than of a preventative nature.

I really enjoyed the course; the field sessions, bat detecting and biological surveying, were particularly outstanding, though that had much to do with the environment and weather. My only regret is that the course only lasted a week and only included one Indian meal....c'est la vie.

Matthew Stephens