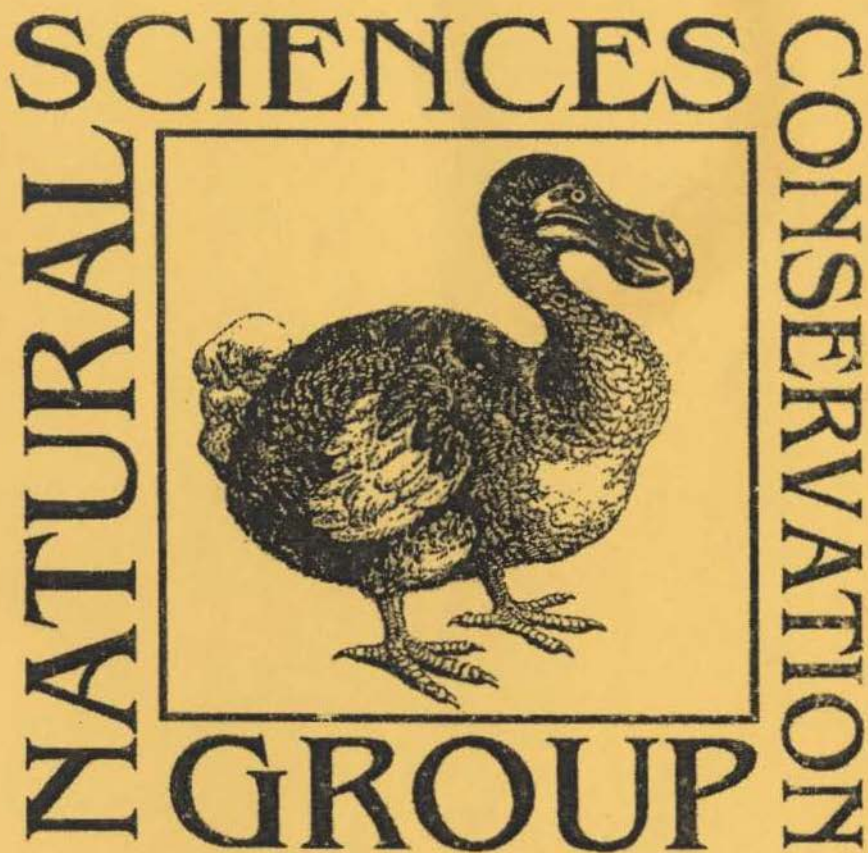


Natural Sciences
Conservation Group
Newsletter

Issue 10

Jan 1999

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*Insert: Ten Agents of Decay -
No.5 'Temperature' & No.6 'Relative Humidity'*

Editorial

Welcome to issue 10 of our newsletter.

Apologies for the delay in editing and producing this issue. On returning for the Christmas break we discovered a major infestation of *Stegobium paniceum* (biscuit beetle) within the natural history stores here at Liverpool. An intensive 4 week programme of searching, cleaning, packing and freezing (and continued monitoring!) followed involving many staff. Other items of work had to be put on hold until the safety of the collections was established. The source then located, I was able to turn my attention back to the newsletter. Strangely I heard my own editorial voice inside my head, "You know a write-up should really be done on this episode...." Possibly for a Pests (no. 3 'Ten Agents') additional piece... watch this space!

Please continue to let us know what's going on out there; what projects you're involved with, reviews of any courses you have recently attended.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue.

Donna Young (nee Hughes)

Note:

The article 'The Perfect Relationship' by Paul brown (pp. 47-49 Issue 9) was based on notes used for his presentation given our meeting in Liverpool in May 1998. Paul will be submitting for publication a more detailed and accurate account of the relationship between Balmforth and the Natural History Museum. This will appear in a future edition.

Any articles for inclusion in the newsletter should be sent to Donna at:
The Botany Department, Liverpool Museum, William Brown St,
Liverpool, L3 8EN. e.mail: donna@nmgmnhc.demon.co.uk
If on disc or by attached email file: in Word 6 or 7 format. Please also include hardcopy.

Articles for next newsletter needed by **05.04.99**

View from the Chair

I hope all our members had a Happy Christmas, and I hope you will all have a prosperous and successful New Year. Talking of success I want to formally congratulate Victoria Purewall from The National Museum of Wales in Cardiff and Kate Andrew from Ludlow Museum, for winning the "Student Conservator of the Year" award and the runner up award in the "Conservator of the Year" respectively.

The Conservation Awards are run by the MGC and the "Jerwood Foundation" and are a national and highly contested competition. They received their prestigious awards at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London in December. These two conservators have raised the profile of natural history conservation. Well done, and the drinks are on you!

I hope those of you who are trying for Fast Track Accreditation are sending back your forms or applying for the second tranche NOW. Various other committee members and myself are applying, and I have been asked to sit on the accreditation appeals committee. I think it is important that Natural Sciences are represented at the highest levels.

I was asked in November to talk to "The Photographic Materials Conservation Group" at the National Gallery. They were anxious to know why the NSCG split from UKIC. The photographic conservators are considering their own accreditation system and are considering whether to use the UKIC's system and whether or not to affiliate to UKIC.

We have already been down this road before and so I was able to give them the benefit of our experience.

It's good to know that the NSCG is being asked for advice by other groups on such important issues.

The committee has decided to hold our AGM and conference in Leicester and to have it later in the year than usual. In this way we can coincide the meeting with the opening of the new galleries in Leicester Museum. We intend to have tours of stores labs and to have a problem object seminar. See elsewhere in this newsletter for the call for papers.

Bob Entwistle

Conservation Focus

News and Events from the Conservation World

Awards for the Natural Sciences

In December The Jerwood Foundation and Museums and Galleries Commission announced their Conservation Awards for 1998. The awards aim to draw attention to the importance of conservation and to the very high standards of conservation practised in the UK. The awards were presented by Alan Howarth CBE MP, Minister for the Arts, at a ceremony held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Of the four awards, natural sciences were represented twice. This was a great achievement and we are very proud of the result for our two members, Kate Andrew and Vicky Purewal. Kate, the runner up for the Award for Conservation, was unfortunately unable to attend the ceremony but much to my delight I was able to witness Vicky's genuine surprise and joy at being presented with the award of Student Conservator of the Year.

The winner of the top 'Award for Conservation' was Keith Barley, Barley Studio, York, for the conservation of late medieval narrative windows in St. Mary the Virgin Church in Fairford. Loyd Grossman, MGC Commissioner and Chairman of the Judges, noted that Kate was a very close contender in this category and was so awarded 'Runner-up'. The conservation work put forward by Kate was that undertaken on the wall-mounted Saurians, fossil marine reptiles, at Whitby Museum. The judges said "Katherine Andrew, then an independent conservator, faced a number of challenges with patience, determination and flair. With great ingenuity she adopted innovative, cost-effective solutions to objects of world importance." Kate received £1,500, which she will spend on equipping the conservation laboratory in the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre.

Vicky, National Museums and Galleries of Wales, completed a part-time MSc at De Montford University, Leicester from 1996-98. She won her award for her MSc project work concerning the composition analysis and

study of pesticide residues present on herbarium sheets from the NMGW collection. The judges were impressed with her enthusiasm and courage in dealing with a subject area which has barely been touched. Her study has proved that there is a genuine risk of mercury contamination to those working with herbarium specimens and has successfully changed working practices within NMGW to increase protection for those working on these collections. They said, "This is a student who has asked difficult questions, found the answers and followed them through. An innovative and ground-breaking project which has changed the approach and working practices in this field." Vicky will receive a prize of £3,500 and intends to use this to continue her research and undertake a part-time PhD at De Montford University (who also will receive a prize of £1,000).

Vicky intends to present the results of the project later this year. Watch this space for publication details.

*Donna Young
Liverpool Museum*

Another Glittering Prize for The Conservation Centre!

The Conservation Centre, Liverpool, has been accumulating a growing collection of awards since its opening in October 1996. Latest badge of honour, awarded in Dublin in September 1998, is the Keck Award, which brings with it a prize of £1,000. The Centre also won a £1,000 prize with the Gulbenkian Award in 1997; that money has been used to commission seating, in the form of a stone bench, for the public area.

List of Conservation Centre Awards to date:

IIC Keck Award, 1998

The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works
For the promotion of public understanding and appreciation of the accomplishments of the conservation profession.

European Museum of the Year Award, 1998

Awarded by the Museum Forum

Interpret Britain Award, 1998

for the Public Programme,

The Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage

In recognition of excellent interpretive practice contributing to greater awareness and understanding of Britain's Heritage

Interpret Britain Award, A Special Judge's Award, 1998

for the Public Programme,

The Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage

In recognition of excellent interpretive practice contributing to greater awareness and understanding of Britain's Heritage

The Conservation Awards, Special Award, 1997

For The Conservation Centre Public Programmes for Outstanding Contribution to Conservation

Sponsored by the Jerwood Foundation

The Gulbenkian Prize, 1997

Awarded from The Gulbenkian Awards for Museums and Galleries

United Utilities North West Tourism Award, 1997

Courses and Meetings

Skin and Bones

Biology Curators Group AGM and Seminar Meeting

A two-part meeting taking place from 25-27th March 1999

I: Bones II

A follow-up to the successful first stage meeting in Chester will be held at the Natural History Museum, London on Thursday 25th from 09.30 - 15.45. The morning session will comprise a number of talks on all aspects of caring for skeletal material. In the afternoon there will be hands-on practical demonstrations, and an opportunity to make a behind-the-scenes visit to the NHM's Palaeontology conservation laboratory. Tea, coffee and a sandwich lunch will be provided.

At 16.00 delegates will travel by coach to Margate.

II: Fur and Feathers

On Friday 26th participants will take the coach to the Powell-Cotton Museum, Birchington, arriving at 09.45. The museum has one of the country's largest collections of mounted animals. The day will be given over to talks on a range of subjects linked to the theme of taxidermy as a modern means of interpretation. Tea, coffee and a buffet lunch will be provided.

At 17.00 delegates will travel by coach back to Margate.

On Saturday 27th a coach will travel to Powell-Cotton Museum for a tour of exhibitions and museum stores with members of the Guild of Taxidermy.

At 12.00 delegates will travel by coach back to London.

Cost:

Registration: all three days - £15; single days - £7.50

Travel: £10 (estimate cost dependant on numbers)

Hotel: £30 - £35 per night

For registration form please contact: Kathie Way, Zoology Department, Natural History Museum, London, SW7 5BD.

(Hotel details will be sent to all those registering)

Professional Development Seminar

Tate Gallery Auditorium, Clore Gallery Entrance

Friday 16 April 1999, 9:00 - 12:30 a.m.

A second chance to attend the IPC Professional Development Seminar!
Cost: £28 to members of any Conservation Forum body, £35 to non-members.

Organised by IPC to coincide with the current preparation for accreditation by some of the conservation bodies, this seminar is open to anyone interested in developing themselves in a professional capacity, whether it be for the purposes of accreditation or not. CPD will help you maintain, enhance and increase your knowledge.

Sessions include:

- An exploration of what it means to be a 'Professional Conservator'. Alison Richmond, Course Tutor, RCA/V&A Joint Course in Conservation.
- What is professional development? Speaker Valerie King, Training Development Officer, Conservation Unit, MGC.
- The development process. The CPD scheme of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors will be described as an example of the approach of a well established professional body. This will include a look at the tools they have developed to help each of their members make CPD work for them. For example the processes recommended for identifying current position, the identification of broad areas of 'skill' (not just technical), the influence of different learning styles, how to make the most of planned and unplanned opportunities, and how to demonstrate evidence of achievement. (Speaker to be confirmed).
- 'Keeping a CPD record'. The guidelines developed by the Conservation Unit's Advisory Panel on Education and Training will be discussed. (Speaker to be confirmed).

For further information please contact:

Clare Hampson or Tina Boyle at IPC, Leigh Lodge, Leigh, Worcester WR6 5LB.

Tel: 01886 832323

Fax: 01886 833688

Email: clare@ipc.org.uk.

CAC 25th Annual Conference and Workshop

26-30th May 1999, Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property will be holding its annual conference 28-30th May. A poster session, trade fair and tours are planned to accompany the conference sessions.

A training event, 'Green Conservation: Environmental and Human Safety in Conservation' will be held from 26-27th May. Workshop sessions will focus on identification, assessment and mitigation of known and potential health and environmental hazards related to conservation treatments, collections and site care. Solutions on how to make sites and collections safe and accessible will also be examined.

The main themes of the workshop will be:

- Examples of 'greener' or less toxic alternatives in treatment and display of collections
- Construction/renovation of heritage facilities
- Caring for hazardous collections and sites
- Disaster recovery of biologically and chemically damaged collections

Demonstrations and/or displays of safety equipment and procedures are planned to accompany the sessions.

For more information please contact:

Shelagh Linklater, Program Chair, CAC Workshop 1999, provincial Archives of Manitoba, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, MB R3C 1T5.

Tel: (204) 945-1265

Fax: (204) 948-2008

Email: slinklater@chc.gov.mb.ca

Adhesives for Textile and Leather Conservation: Research and Application

4-7th May 1999, CCI, Ottawa, Canada

A Professional Development Workshop. Practical conservation techniques and science together in one workshop. Learn about old, new, innovative, and historical adhesive treatments for backing and mounting textiles and backing skin/leather. At the same time, learn about the most recent adhesive research at CCI's textile and skin/leather research projects. This four-day workshop combines extensive hands-on sessions and demonstrations with informative interactive lectures and discussions. Topics will include:

- adhesives for supporting, backing and mounting of textiles and skin/leather.
- case histories and ethical concerns.
- preparation and application of backings.
- adhesives for mount-making (theory and applications).
- demonstrations of suction table, silicone pad making, BCIN searching.
- CCI research on poly (vinyl acetate) and acrylic adhesives.
- the effect of adhesives on vinyl acetate/ethylene copolymer emulsion adhesive.
- CCI research on skin/leather.
- CCI research on textiles.
-

Participants should have practical experience in the conservation of textiles, and/or leather and skin objects.

Registration fee: (prior to 1st March 1999) - US\$ 525, (after this date) - US\$ 575.

Enrolment is limited, but if demand is high a second workshop will be held in the following week.

For further information and registration forms please contact:

Christine Bradley, Client Services Officer, Canadian Conservation Institute, 1030 Innes Road, Ottawa ON K1A 0M5, Canada.

Tel: (613) 998-3721 ext. 250

Fax: (613) 998-4721

Email: christinebradley@pch.gc.ca

Reversibility - Does it Exist?

8-10th September 1999, London.

The British Museum Department of Conservation will hold a three-day conference. The concept of reversibility as applied to cleaning, stabilisation, consolidation, assembly, and restoration will be addressed, as will changes to the physical or chemical properties of objects as a result of conservation. The conference will be confined to the portable heritage, excluding buildings but including mosaics and wall paintings.

For further information and registration pack please contact:

Sara Carroll, Department of Conservation, the British Museum, Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3DG

Fax: 0171 323 8636

Email: conservation@british-museum.ac.uk

Human Remains: Conservation Retrieval and Analysis

7-11th November 1999, Williamsburg, VA, USA.

This conference is being organised by the Departments of Conservation and Archaeology at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Each of the disciplines invited to the conference (conservators, archaeologists, curators, bioarchaeologists and physical anthropologists), approaches human remains from a different point and often at a different time from the others - at times the techniques used by one discipline may impede the work of another.

The aim of the conference is to serve as a forum for discussion between the various professions and to foster interdisciplinary understanding on matters relating to the need for standardisation and the potential for developing policies and procedures relating to the removal, documentation and storage of human remains.

For further information on the program please contact:

Emily Williams, Department of Conservation - BHW, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, P.O. Box 1776, Williamsburg, VA, 23187-1776, USA

Tel: (757) 220 7079

Fax: (757) 565 8752

Email: ewilliams@cwf.org

New Publication

Care and Conservation of Natural History Collections.

David Carter & Annette Walker 1999.

Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford. 226pp

Hardback: 246 x 189 mm: ISBN 0 7506 0961 3: £50.00

A Review

This is the latest volume in Butterworth-Heinemann's series in Conservation and Museology but with an immediate difference being apparent, a picture on the front cover of faded and non-faded atlas moths, a departure from the usual unimaginative black covers. Geological and palaeontological materials conservation have already been covered in this series by Frank Howie and Chris Collins respectively, so this volume covers the curation and conservation of botany, entomology and zoology specimens only. The senior authors, who both work in the Entomology Department at The Natural History Museum in London, are David Carter, an expert in Lepidoptera taxonomy and a Collections Manager, and Annette Walker, a Scientific Associate (Hymenoptera) who has already produced a work on the 'Preparation and Curation of Insects' with T. K. Crosby (1988).

The preface defines terms, splitting the "researcher" who studies the collection from the "curator" (preparator-conservator) who cares for the collection. Short term preparation and preservation methods are considered to have a profound effect on subsequent care and conservation of specimens and occupy the majority of some chapters. The title could perhaps have included the word 'Preparation'. There is a strong emphasis on preventative methods, maintaining appropriate levels of environmental control is cheaper than active conservation necessary as a result of a failure in preparation or care. Also stressed is the need to conserve as much of the specimen as possible for detailed taxonomic research.

The chapters cover the problems of preservation/conservation of 'Vertebrates' (Dick Hendry), 'Insects & other invertebrates' by Carter &

Walker, Mike Fitton and Dick Van-Wright, 'Vascular plants' by David Bedford and 'Non-vascular plants and fungi' by Chris Humphries and Rob Huxley. 'Fluid preservation' by Simon Moore has a much higher conservation content and the very relevant chapter 'Genetic Material' by Terence Brown explains how DNA degrades and discusses which treatments are worst and best for its preservation. The 'Collections environment' chapter covers the location and suitability of museum buildings, rooms and storage, the requirement to separate different museum functions and environmental monitoring and control. The 'Pest management, prevention and control' chapter describes the pests and has comprehensive discussion on 'Integrated Pest Management' techniques (David Pinniger and J D Harmon). The 'Policies and procedures' chapter (Carter & Walker) covers the useful areas of designing and setting up conservation policy, risk assessment, acquisitions and disposal, loans and training policy and collections assessments and conditions surveys.

The Appendices cover 'Documentation' (Carter & Walker), which looks at the different levels of documentation and the use of computer databases and bar codes, and 'Papers, inks and label conservation' (Carter & Walker) which discusses the important issue of using the correct archival papers and inks, particularly useful when using computer generated labels. Further appendices cover 'Disaster planning' written for the NHM's Entomology Department (Jim Reynolds) and 'Flood disaster; a case study' by G. M. Tarmann who writes about the 'nightmare scenario' flood at the Tiroler Landeskundliches Museum, Innsbruck, Austria in August 1985. There is a variety of styles within the work which always is the case when different authors are involved.

The 42 colour plates placed together in one block and 87 black and white photos scattered through the text are of good quality. The line drawings in the insect chapter are reused from Walker & Crosby and could have been replaced by photographs. Small criticisms in the Insect and invertebrate chapter, on page 51, are that microscope slide collections should not be taken for granted as being permanent and may need environmentally stable conditions; and on page 56, the procedure for remounting deteriorating slides of unknown mounting medium is over-simplified. If a mount is found not to be water soluble, a soak in 10% potassium hydroxide

should be tried and failing that, an acetone soak, before resorting to xylene or Euparal Essence. Such work should always be carried out by expert slide preparators and watched very closely to avoid over-treatment when exploring the solubility of a deteriorated slide mountant. It would have been nice to see the NSCG and Biology Curators' Group mentioned specifically as being interested organisations (as was the Guild of Taxidermists) as many of our members contributed. Also, the problems and long term performance of Alizarin and other techniques used for skeletal and cartilage specimen staining could have been mentioned.

There is no doubt that this volume will become 'The Manual' for natural history collections care and conservation, with concise information and a comprehensive up to date bibliography (e.g. Simon Moore's chapter is particularly comprehensive and quotes Julian Carter's latest work on spirit preservatives published in 1997). A general work like this does not have the room to go into fine detail on all possible conservation problems, but the bibliography will provide many of the answers. Future long-term research is required to solve some outstanding conservation problems and the results of such research should feature in any future editions of this work.

Paul A. Brown
The Natural History Museum



UKIC Accreditation Update

Simon Moore has kindly offered to sit on the UKIC accreditation Committee as Natural Sciences Rep., somewhat at the eleventh hour, and is now prepared to answer any questions that aspiring 'accreditees' may have. Please e-mail him (preferably) on musmsm@hants.gov.uk or call on 01962 846337.

The last meeting for the fast track system took place on the 14th of October. The fast track system is now all set to go ahead and those who have notified the UKIC office will get their forms in November.

Points to take note:

- To qualify for the fast track you must have completed at least 10 years in conservation, this does not mean that it has to be in the same discipline that you are applying to be accredited (within reasonable limits). Any training undergone will also be included in the 10 years. If you are close to completing your 10 years the committee will review your application and may allow you to proceed, particularly if there are not many fast track applicants from your chosen discipline.
- Your workplace may undertake to pay for your accreditation fees.
- You will need to get at least 2 sponsors who know of/understand your work, these may be from abroad if necessary.
- Insurers have indicated that rates for accredited conservators will be MUCH lower than previously.
- The NSCG committee has agreed to go for the UKIC schemes.
- The Fast Track scheme will run during 1999 (two groups) during which candidates will be assessed according to the requirements set out by the accreditation committee.
- Once the fast track scheme has been completed then those who have been accredited will be asked to start assessing candidates for the mainstream scheme.

The Ten Agents of Deterioration

An issue by issue guide to the risks facing museum collections



5. Temperature & 6. Relative Humidity

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Web page: www.hanwell.com

- Changes suggested by the NSCG Committee have now been made to the list of specialisms relating to Natural Sciences.
- Proposal folders are available from the UKIC office.

Simon Moore
Hampshire County Council Museum Service



also....Insurance Update from Simon

Many thanks to all of you who responded to the blue sheet insurance form. Your details have been logged and the scheme is ready to go. There is one problem: I still need 4 more people to complete the scheme. At present we have 6 and need 10 to bring the premium level down to something that we can all afford (\$250 rather than \$415 that it would be for 6). I have been asked whether being accredited by UKIC on the fast track system would drastically alter insurance premiums and whereas Crowley Colosso would give accredited conservators a discount (unspecified at present) it would not (could not) drastically alter the present good offer. For those of you who are waiting to be accredited to get a better deal, don't bother waiting. Once you have been accredited, you will automatically receive the discount.

Bear in mind that the package we have been offered is very reasonable, the quote accounts for our not conserving works of art worth millions; I would urge you to accept this offer if you are doing any freelance work in the field of natural sciences.

Fill in the form and send it to me as soon as possible, so that we can get this scheme underway. To those of you who have already done so, I apologise for the delay, but I hope you can understand why!

Accreditation – a Professional Qualification for Museum Conservators?

The United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) and other British conservation groups are developing plans for the introduction of a professional qualification for all conservators. Recently Bob Entwistle and Simon Moore of the Natural Science Conservation Group (NSCG) summarised the situation in a letter to the membership of the NSCG.

"UKIC and the other conservation groups expect to have a system of accreditation for conservators up and running by the year 2000. An accredited conservator will be expected to:

- *comply with employment and health and safety regulations;*
- *to be technically competent;*
- *to be professional in his/her conduct;*
- *to abide by a code of ethics.*

It is the aim of the UKIC and the other main Conservation organisations to have one accreditation system for all British conservators."

The current processes of how this is exactly going to work have yet to be fully explored but at the time of this letter the following process was summarised.

"...there will a fast track system for established conservators with over 10 years experience in conservation.

- *Time spent in education will be taken into account but only if the course is a conservation course. Biology and Zoology, for instance, will not count as a conservation course.*
- *It is hoped that this will provide a tool of accredited conservators who can help assess other conservators.*
- *Conservators wishing to be accredited by the fastrack method will need at least two sponsors who know their work to act as referees. They will be assessed by their 'peers' on work they have done/are doing. [The assessment will follow MTI's analysis of competence as they apply to the applicants current job.]*

- *The normal accreditation system will be similar but longer. Accreditation will cost £200 and accredited conservators will have to be members of UKIC, membership of which presently stands at £63 per annum."*

It is expected that a consultant will be appointed to draw up the final procedure, and the scheme is expected to be fully implemented from June 1999.

So where does the NSCG feel they stand on this issue? At the start of the letter it was stated that although the NSCG had a member on the Conservation Forum Committee, the group was too small to have enough influence to change the proposed accreditation scheme to suit the NSCG membership. It was also felt:

"The committee feel that our group is not yet large enough, or financially strong enough to create their own scheme. Providing the UKIC scheme is flexible enough to accommodate natural sciences, we think it would be sensible for interested NSCG members to apply via this scheme.

We think that accreditation may soon be an essential requirement for those in freelance work, and it will be a long term investment for those who require insurance for this type of work. Whether the insurance premium would fall by as much as the annual membership of UKIC remains to be seen. Bob and Simon feel that the work would be more forthcoming to those who are classed as accredited conservators.

It should be stressed that accreditation is not mandatory, but it may be to the advantage of some members, principally those with the word 'conservator' in their job title".

The rest of the letter dealt with future discussions and means of obtaining the required documents from UKIC. Any UKIC member is eligible to apply for 'fast track' accreditation this year if they wish.

The above summarises very briefly the proposed mechanisms for accreditation in conservation. The amount of material actually written on the subject

is somewhat more voluminous! To read it all would mean cancelling your life for a while...

As an actual practising museum conservator, specialising in zoological collections, I have a number of serious queries over this accreditation process.

- Existing qualification: It has been stated that only conservation based qualification will be taken into consideration for 'fast track' accreditation. This means that my existing degree in Environmental Biology will not count towards my training when in reality it should. A conservator can only practise their work to a competent level if they understand their subject. My training in a biological degree provides this, along with a strong background in chemistry. This is of far more value in work conserving zoological collections than a standard conservation degree.
- Assessment: There are few dedicated natural science conservators and I am one of them. It would be difficult to find suitably qualified referees to carry out the assessment. There currently appears to be no provision in dealing with the more specialist groups in the conservation field.
- UKIC membership: This is a body that has already let natural science conservation down in the past with its 'professional' reforms in its constitution. I cannot see UKIC adopting a flexibility that would be beneficial to a small and specialist section such as the natural sciences, especially as it is a section with little 'political' clout.
- Cost £60 to join UKIC plus a further £200 to become accredited is all very well. However, I am certain that a professional qualification will not provide a professional wage! It is also becoming apparent that in order to remain accredited you will have to stay a member of the UKIC – no membership, no accreditation – so much for freedom of qualification.....

Where a specialist and outlying section of the conservation profession such as the natural sciences fits into the accreditation process is still unclear, especially in view of the very limited amount of subject related training that

is available. However, it does appear that the Natural Science Training Scheme, that is currently run between the University of Cambridge, the Natural History Museum and the National Museum of Wales, is going to be endorsed by the MTI and will be an acceptable part of a conservators training programme. However, I teach on this course so where does that put me?

One cannot condone the effort that is being made to provide training and acceptable qualification, but with all this effort in trying to develop training are we losing sight of our actual roles in a sea of paperwork, certificates and bureaucracy?

*Julian Carter
Zoological Conservation Officer
National Museum and Galleries of Wales*

This article has also been submitted to the *Biology Curator*, the newsletter of the Biology Curators Group.

Reply from Bob Entwistle and Simon Moore (on behalf of NSCG committee) to Julian Carter's letter on Accreditation:

Simon Moore recently attended an accreditation meeting in London, where he put Julian Carter's points directly to UKIC/IPC, and argued the case for Natural Sciences.

- 1) The Accreditation committee have agreed that Julian's degree is acceptable to put towards training time for accreditation.

This is an important turn around by UKIC. It means that your training/qualifications will be taken into account as long as you can argue the case. Memo UKIC and talk to Simon Moore, our representative on the committee, before you apply for the second stage of fast

track accreditation. In this way you will not lose your fee and may very well be successful.

The present paucity of conservation qualifications in Natural Sciences means that other qualifications especially if they are concerned with material science should be acceptable towards Fast Track accreditation training and work experience.

- 2) Julian is concerned that there are few dedicated natural science conservators qualified to assess candidates. This is true but I suspect others have misunderstood the position. To apply for fast track accreditation you can be sponsored by any conservator who knows and understands your work. You DO NOT have to be sponsored by a specialist natural science conservator. Only one of your sponsors has to be a conservator and the conservator does NOT have to be a member of UKIC to apply for Fast Track accreditation.
- 3) UKIC membership. The NSCG broke away from UKIC because it changed its constitution which meant that members had to join in 'full' and could not simply join a section. To remain would have meant our demise as a specialist group. UKIC know that it was not our wish to break away from them and they fully understand our position. The situation is unfortunate, but it is beyond our control.

UKIC still look very favourably on our group, and together with other specialist non-aligned conservation groups we are members of the Conservation Forum, (ABC). UKIC are anxious to promote natural sciences conservation and have asked us many times to supply papers for publication. The last copy of "The Conservator" had two articles on natural science conservation, one written by Julian himself.

- 4) Cost I agree £200 to be accredited and a further £60 + to join UKIC and remain accredited is steep. However bear in mind that because this is the case now does not mean it will always be the case. Some employers may pay UKIC subs, and others may be willing to assist candidates with the £200 fee. If you haven't already asked your employer for help, ask now. Your institution may have a training or

similar, budget which could bear part of the cost. Private conservators are less fortunate and will have to bear the cost themselves. Bear in mind that there are tax allowances for subs.

UKIC/IPC spent a lot of money and a lot of their members time in setting up their accreditation system. If we wish to set up our own system we must be willing to put the time, effort and funding into doing it. At present we have 100 members. Our subs are low and our coffers are healthy but not overflowing. Members who wish to be involved in organising an accreditation scheme of our own must be willing to put in a lot of their own time. Since we are a small group we do not think that at present our own accreditation system, if we had one, would be a viable alternative. This could change in the future.

Natural sciences conservation is still young and looking for recognition. Also working with what some people think of as low value objects can create professional snobbery. Turning our backs on what is happening in the rest of the conservation world will not help us to overcome these prejudices. We need to be involved and play our part.

Accreditation should create recognition for freelance conservators.

UKIC want to get as many conservators accredited as possible. We want to get as many natural science conservators accredited as possible. Don't be put off if you feel your qualifications etc are not appropriate. If you have problems contact Simon Moore your accreditation rep and he will bring them up at committee meetings.

Simon Moore and Bob Entwistle.

Since writing this letter both Bob and Simon have spoken to Julian about his concerns and he has agreed to his letter being published.

SPNHC to Report on Priorities for Research in the Conservation of Natural History Collections

The National Park Service and the National Center for Preservation Training and Technology have awarded the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections \$9950 through the NCPTT grant support programme. This award will be used to support the creation of a professional report on priorities for research in the conservation of natural history collections. Principal investigator on this project is Dr. Paisley S. Cato, Director of Collections Care and Conservation at the San Diego Natural History Museum. Dr. Cato will co-ordinate the project with input from SPNHC members and committees.

This project will provide a useful and timely reference for people dealing with the needs of preserving natural history collections for research, education and exhibition.

SPNHC is a multi-disciplinary international organisation composed of individuals and institutions who are interested in the development and preservation of natural history collections. Natural history collections include specimens and supporting documentation, such as audio-visual materials, labels, library materials, field data and similar archives. Preservation refers to any direct or indirect activity providing continued and improved care of these collections and supporting documents. The Society actively encourages the participation of individuals involved with all aspects of natural history collections.

The National Center for Preservation Technology and Training is an interdisciplinary effort by the National Park Service to advance the art, craft and science of historic preservation in the fields of archaeology, historic architecture, historic landscape, materials conservation and history. NCPTT serves public and private practitioners through research, education and information management.

*Sally Shelton
President, SPNHC*

Conservation and Preservation Materials and Equipment

Resistall Paper

Thanks to the requests from Natural History conservators and curators, we are pleased to offer Resistall for specimens stored in alcohol or formaldehyde.

Microscope Slide Holders

These sturdy 175 Micron polyester captive flap sleeves hold 1" x 3" (80 x 32 mm) glass slides. Developed by Paul Brown, Curator of Entomology at the Natural History Museum.

Entomology Cabinet

Designed to take existing entomology trays, size 446 x 443 x 57 mm, with 20 drawer spaces per cabinet. The lockable door has a seal to keep out possible infestation.

Archival Acid-Free Boxes

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Storage Cabinets

Our storage cabinets include storage for maps, prints, drawings, entomology, geology, negatives, photographs, video cassettes, compact discs, microfilm and other works of art.

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Deodorising Skeletal Material

A section of shark vertebral column was recently brought to me from the County's SEARCH educational unit, which provides me with many challenging jobs since children are handling biological specimens. The problem with much dry elasmobranch skeletal material is that it develops an unpleasantly fishy smell after a while. This particular sample attracted many critical comments from children who visited the facility and I was asked to remove or replace the smell with something more pleasant.

The sample of shark vertebral column, measuring 18 cm in length, was first rehydrated in about 2% aqueous Decon 90 overnight and then transferred to a mild bleach of about 5 volume hydrogen peroxide in distilled water with a trace of 0.880 ammonia which acts as a catalyst. The column was then left in water for about 12 hours and any pieces of rehydrated adherent tissue were removed. The sample was transferred to 50% IMS for dehydration for about 4 hours and then to 80% alcohol. A few drops of aromatherapy oil suitably entitled 'Oceanus' were added to the alcohol giving a sweet sea breezes aroma to the mixture. The column was left in this for 2 weeks, then removed and left to dry out under restraints to prevent flexing of the sample during drying.

The result was a pleasant smelling and cleaner vertebral column. The children were happy well for about 4 months, then back it came again. Although the Oceanus oil was still present there was that unpleasant fishy smell as well!

A search through the literature has revealed nothing to help with this problem so it will be a repeat of the re-odourising treatment using a stronger-smelling oil provocatively entitled 'Cannabis'! What might this lead to?

Seriously, the technique works well on freshly prepared osteological material and the Oceanus is a non-pervasive, non-irritating smell that removes the bony smell from such samples. The recurrence of the original odour in cartilaginous skeletal material is more problematic. Has anyone had such experiences or are our collections' natural smells all right for us hardened

scientists? When it comes to dealing with the public, children especially, that's a different matter!

Simon Moore
Hampshire County Council Museums Service



An alternative and completely non-invasive method of dealing with smelly specimens is detailed in "Storage System for Odoriferous Skeletal Material" by Tamsen Fuller, in 'Storage of Natural History Collections: Ideas and Practical Solutions, Carolyn L. Rose and Amparo R. De Torres (ed.s), SPNHC (pub.), Pittsburgh, PA, 1992, pp 247-248.

This article gives clear instructions for the use of an absorbant (activated charcoal) within a simple but dedicated storage container to combat odours.

Tracey Seddon
Conservation Centre, NMGM

Note from Ed:

'Oceanus' is not an aromatherapy oil, but a perfume oil produced by The Body Shop. A full list of ingredients of this product can be found on the bottle. If anyone would like to comment on Simon's controversial methods please write in.

NSCG Conference and AGM 1999
Tuesday 22nd - Wednesday 23rd June

CALL FOR PAPERS

Showing It Off
- Conserving Specimens for Display

This year our conference will be held at New Walk Museum in Leicester.

The general theme of the meeting will be preparation for display; both restoration and preventative conservation methods employed. Papers are invited covering issues dealing with individual specimens, display case design and environmental conditions.

Along with a trade fair, tours will be provided of preparation areas.

If you would be willing to present either a paper or poster please contact Nick Gordon by June 7th (address of back page of issue) to discuss abstract.

A registration form for the conference will be posted to members in April. The approximate costs (yet to be confirmed), will be £10 for members and £15 for non-
smokers.

Conservation Project - Natural Sciences
(Echinodermata & Spirit Preserved Specimens)

Exeter City Museum has recently been successful in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project to conserve an important collection of echinoderms and its assorted historic display.

The Conservation Department is looking for a conservator with a background in natural sciences to carry out conservation of the specimens and supervise student interns also working on the project. A recognised qualification in conservation would be desirable.

Conservation is expected to extend over a period of approximately 18 months, commencing early summer 1999, and specialist training may be provided as necessary.

Interested parties are invited to phone the Keeper of Conservation, Alison Hopper Bishop, during March for further information and an informal chat about the project on 01392 265307, or write for further details to: Conservation Department, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Queen Street, Exeter EX4 3RX.

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