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## OAK HILL PARK MUSEUM, ACCRINGTON, 1900-1951

In 1855-6 a shop in Abbey Street, Accrington, Lancs., was converted into a museum under the care of Ormerod and William Chadwick, Henry Barben, Richard Fish and William Booth. The collections, mainly of mounted birds and a few antiquities, were soon transferred to a wooden building in what later became Milnshaw Park. Here the specimens apparently spoiled through lack of care. However, this inauspicious venture does not seem to have dampened the townspeople's enthusiasm and in 1900 Oak Hill Mansion was opened as a museum.

The house had been built by Thomas Hargreaves in 1815 on the site of an earlier structure and subsequently enlarged. During the latter part of the nineteenth century it remained vacant for some years and, after a local referendum to assess public support, Accrington Corporation obtained sanction to borrow the purchase money (£12,048) in 1892.

Right from the start the collections were mainly of natural history interest (though a large local history collection grew up). The Accrington Naturalists Society gave its collection, but the major donations came from Col. J. W. Rimington of Upper Norwood, Surrey (b.1832 d.1909) via his cousin, Mrs. Grace Robertson-Aikman, the grand-daughter of Thomas Hargreaves. Though she too lived in Upper Norwood, Mrs. Aikman maintained a very philanthropic attitude to her home town and paid for the construction of insect cases, a cabinet for the herbarium and other items out of her own pocket. After Col. Rimington's death she purchased his large insect collection, donated it to the museum and paid for a Mr. Rippon, an entomologist, to arrange the collection. The remainder of the collections were arranged by Dr. B. W. Gerland and his son, Dr. Conrad Gerland.

A rough estimate of the museum's natural history holdings, not including more than 2,000 fossils and 10,000 minerals, would be approximately 100,000 specimens.

The museum always had a full-time curator, these were:- Mr. Robert Wigglesworth 1900-1911; Wm. Eastwood 1911-1922; and Mr. A. Hanson 1922-47, and was administered by the Parks Committee.

During the 1930's the style and content of the committee minutes indicate a decline in interest in the museum and part of the downstairs area was converted for use as a cafe.

In 1942 both the museum and the Haworth Art Gallery, Accrington, were closed down for the duration and their respective curators given duties in other departments. The curator of the Art Gallery was fairly quickly restored to part-time curatorial duties after some damage to the collections had occurred. However, Mr. Hanson remained with the

Weights and Measures Department and the museum stayed closed. In May 1946 the post of Museum curator was struck off the establishment and in December 1947, after Mr. Hanson's retirement, a sub-committee recommended the permanent closure of the museum and the disposal of its exhibits. Despite some objections, this was later ratified by full Council. However, a letter from the Ministry of Education was received which stated that a museum "organised on modern lines" would undoubtedly be an asset to the Borough, and a special sub-committee was set up to look into the possibility of reopening the museum. This sub-committee corresponded with both Carnegie U.K. Trust and the Museums Association who arranged for Dr. D. A. Allen of the Royal Scottish Museum to visit the museum and prepare a report. This report which was considered by the sub-committee in July 1950 sheds no light on the importance of the collections and basically recommended the setting up of a properly staffed and financed museum service elsewhere in the Borough due to the poor state of repair of Oak Hill Mansion. The reorganisation scheme was immediately dropped and the collections were given away, sold or destroyed during 1951.

Major donors of natural history specimens:-

- Assheton - Two cabinets containing 238 nests, 1343 eggs. Given by Mrs. Assheton of Canterbury, formerly of Knowlmere Manor, Slaidburn, 12.10.1929.
- Bloor - Yorkshire lepidoptera (370 spms.). Given by Mrs. Bloor, 11.4.1929. Mr. Bloor was a "well known entomologist, breeder and collector".
- Bowles, Wm. - Unknown number of "ferns and plants", 5.7.1931.
- Rimington, Col. J. W. Herbarium. Probably the greater part of 15,000 "commercial and medicinal plants, ferns, seaweeds, mosses and lichens". (There are Rimington Herbarium specimens at Manchester Museum, but these are not from the Accrington collection).  
Lepidoptera and coleoptera. Some donated during 1900-1908, the bulk (valued at £2,000) given by Mrs. Robertson-Aikman after his death in 1909. More than 50,000 specimens including 20,000 British among which were "many rare and extinct specimens".  
Mollusca. Probably the bulk of 25,000 shells mentioned in the 1933 "Guide". Given by Mrs. Robertson-Aikman, 1911, "a valuable collection".  
Minerals. A large collection (details to G. C. G.).
- Wigglesworth, R. - Added generally to the collections, but especially mollusca. Gave 6,000 shells, possibly the 6,000 fresh water shells mentioned in the 1933 "Guide".

There were also some 500 mounted birds from various donors and a smaller number of mammals and representatives of other animal groups.

In 1951 the exhibits were either offered back to their donors where known, destroyed, given to schools or finally sold with the display cases which contained them.

The fossils were dumped on a local tip and the herbarium was destroyed along with the majority of the mammals and mounted birds. The mineral collection was obtained for Reading University where it remains virtually untouched to date (details to G. C. G.). As many of the schools which asked for specimens as still exist were contacted, but all except one deny all knowledge of any existing material.

Persons or institutions which definitely obtained Accrington museum material are listed below:-

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|-------------------------------------|--|
| Bryce, Dr. D.                       | N. E. London Polytechnic. Purchased one cabinet and several storeboxes which contained microlepidoptera from Korea and S. E. Asia collected by Meek and Leach. These were passed on to the B. M. (N.H.) and were probably part of the Rimington collection.  |
| Cook, J. M.                         | Burnley, Lancs. Mr. Cook's father obtained a 14-drawer cabinet of birds eggs and two 32-drawer insect cabinets. The eggs and contents of one insect cabinet were destroyed during an office break-in some years ago and Mr. Cook gave these cabinets to Towneley Hall Museum last year. The bottom drawer of the egg cabinet contains 100 tubes with mosses. Mr. Cook retained the remaining cabinet which contains exotic butterflies - part of the Rimington collection. |
| Hosie, G. Glasgow.                  | Purchased 2 insect cabinets of 16 and 20-drawers containing exotic lepidoptera. Retained one cabinet for own collection, the other sold empty (to Watkins & Doncaster ?). This was probably Rimington material.  |
| Lee Royd Nursery School, Accrington | Obtained a few shells (no cabinets), a handful without labels or data remain.  |
| Malham Tarn Field Centre.           | 54-drawer cabinet originally purchased by Mr. Jopson of Nelson, Lancs., who later donated it to the Centre where it contains local insects. The original contents (foreign butterflies) are now at the Manchester Museum.  |

This was probably Rimington material.

- Manchester Museum (per Mr. A. Brindle) Two 40-drawer cabinets, one held foreign Nymphalidae and Satyridae (now holds British butterflies), the other held foreign moths (now holds foreign hemiptera). This was almost certainly Rimington material.
- Reading University. Asked for and obtained bulk of mineral collection. Also some storeboxes of foreign butterflies (Rimington?) which are now at Manchester Museum, and some of the birds eggs which were used by Prof. Tyler in experiments into the porosity of egg shells.
- Thornton, J. Clayton-le-Moors, Lancs. Purchased one 40-drawer cabinet of British Lepidoptera which he sold "in London" some six years ago. Mr. Thornton retains a few specimens.
- Towneley Hall Museum, Burnley, Lancs. Purchased 34 display cases of exotic insects, mainly butterflies, in 1951. This is definitely Rimington material. Collectors' names on labels include Pratt, Moore, Chary, Lang and Meek, and dates cover the 1880's/90's. Also 618 British land and freshwater gastropods, some of which were part of Robt. Wigglesworth's collection donated recently by Mr. C. Gidman of Accrington.

I would like to thank the persons too numerous to list individually who have helped me to piece together the story of Oak Hill Park Museum and, in particular, Mr. B. Ashton (Accrington Library), Mr. A. Brindle (Manchester Museum) and Mr. C. Gidman (Accrington Naturalists Society), for their special help.

Photocopies of all relevant documents and the voluminous correspondence amassed during the search for surviving material are retained at Towneley Hall Art Gallery & Museums, Burnley.

Information on the collectors involved has been lodged in the files of the Northwest Collection Research Unit at Bolton and Manchester museums.

#### Sources:

- Accrington Corporation Minutes 1900-1952.  
Jubilee Souvenir 1928.  
Guide to Oak Hill Park Museum 1933.  
Various inventories compiled before the closure.  
List of applications for material from schools.  
Typed accessions list 1909-1933 (very incomplete).
- Dr. D. A. Allen's Report on the Museum 1949. (Carnegie U.K. Trust copy now in Scottish Record Office)

Lancashire Naturalist's of note -

Mr. Robert Wigglesworth in Lancs Naturalist 1(3); 33-35 (1907)

M. A. Taylor,  
Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

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### BOLTON'S THIRD SOURCE

Peter Skidmore's article "Tapping the Third Source" in BCG Newsletter No. 9 contains the excellent suggestion that we should analyse the data on specimens in our reference collections. This information on a geographical basis, may be of value to colleagues in other parts of the country who may be unaware that a fair proportion of material exists elsewhere of direct interest to their area. I resolved, therefore, to adopt a similar exercise and using the same parameters for a single "record" (which may be represented by considerably more than one specimen) sampled from the following areas:

1. The Locality Index. This was recently started as a parallel index when the IRGMA system was initiated into the accessioning procedure at Bolton. It contains all recent accessions, the whole of the mammal collection and part of a backlog from the molluscs. This provided 3,321 records.
2. Herbarium - the Cruciferae.
3. Oological collection - the families Sylvanidae and Turdidae.
4. Coleoptera - Carabidae (Cicindela - Loricera inclusive)
5. Hymenoptera - Formicidae.
6. Diptera - Tipulinae (Nephrotoma - Tipula)
7. Aves - genus Passer in the bird skin collections.

These provided a further 1818 records giving a total sample of 5139. What soon became obvious while sampling was that there is a considerable proportion of foreign material incorporated in the collections and indices.