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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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themselves. Bath resided in Birmingham and formed extensive collections of Lepidoptera, Dragonflies, shells, crustacea, birds eggs and nests. Nunney resided in London and had collections of aquatic insects especially dragonflies. Mearns was from Aberdeen and formed collections of insects especially Odonata. Please contact K. G. V. Smith, Department of Entomology, British Museum (Natural History), London, SW7 5BD.

Restitution and Return of Cultural Property

The following paper was presented at the Professional Members Meeting at the Museums Association Edinburgh Conference, and, as reported in the August 'Museums Bulletin', specialist groups have been asked to comment on the contents. Natural history material is included in the proposed negotiations.

Although the majority of biology curators would regard any return of foreign material as unacceptable, there appears to be a danger that this problem will become 'political' and solutions could be imposed upon museums in this country. Apparently Scandinavian museums have already embarked upon large scale return of specimens. Ethnographers in this country are establishing an 'exchange club' for two-way traffic in collections.

It is hoped that the subject will be given a suitable airing at the AGM, and it would be wise to consider drawing up guidelines and conditions for such material as will not affect research and education programmes in this country and will be secure and available when returned.

THE RESTITUTION AND RETURN OF CULTURAL PROPERTY

A note by Geoffrey Lewis

1. UNESCO, at its 19th General Conference in 1976, adopted a resolution (4.128) which inter-alia provided for all necessary measures to be taken for an inter-governmental committee to be established (at its next session) to facilitate bilateral negotiations for the restitution or return of cultural property to those countries having lost them as a result of colonial or foreign occupation. The resolution also sought technical guidance in this matter from ICOM which was available at a meeting of experts in Dakar, March 1978.
2. A mass media campaign to promote this programme and influence public opinion towards it will be organised on a world-wide basis this summer and will be intensified during 1979-80. This is also intended to encourage cooperation between museums to establish inventories of material existing in collections abroad. UNESCO has already initiated a world-wide inventory of representative objects of Oceanic culture and a UNESCO consultant is currently in this country for this purpose.
3. To date the British Government has opposed or abstained from voting on

issues of this nature on the grounds that museums and their collections were not under direct government control.

4. The issue, however, affects national, local authority, university and independent museums in this country. Further, whatever the political considerations, there are profound professional matters involved in these proposals which have never been debated in any detail by museum colleagues in this country. These include:

- (a) the accessibility of the world heritage to scholar and general public alike;
- (b) the implications of split systematic scholarly collections;
- (c) the extent to which a country receiving any returned material can maintain the necessary standards to ensure its preservation and security;
- (d) the impact that the availability of any international monetary fund to assist in the purchase of material might have on world art prices;
- (e) the legal implications of the removal of items from public collections

GDL
18.5.78

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FINANCIAL YEAR AND THE A. G. M.

At the September meeting of BCG Committee the problem of subscriptions was raised by the Treasurer, with a suggestion that the financial year be changed to run from January to December to encourage prompt payment. This was agreed by the Committee. This in turn influences the date of the AGM, originally planned for December with Manchester Museum as the venue. It is now proposed that the AGM will be held following the International Conference on Natural History Collections in April 1979 at the British Museum (Natural History). Provisional date for the AGM is Friday 6th April. See next Newsletter for confirmation.

Manchester Meeting - all day Seminar - Friday 1st December *Given form to IMG.
6.11.78*

This meeting has been planned to enable members to discuss BCG policy matters and propose motions for the AGM in April 1979. A number of issues were raised at the last AGM which never received the attention they deserved, and further matters have arisen since then. The current computing work being undertaken at Manchester is also of obvious interest, and Charles Pettit will provide an introduction to the system being used and its compatibility with other computer packages.

Members are asked to meet at the Manchester Museum at 11.00 a.m. Morning and afternoon sessions are envisaged, with a break for tea and biscuits in the afternoon. The meeting should end about 5 p.m. Anyone requiring advice on overnight accommodation are asked to telephone Mike Hounsome (061 273 3333 ext. 3129).