Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Storage of Mounted Birds and Mammals (Bradford Museums)

Author(s): Rogers, J.

Source: Rogers, J. (1978). Storage of Mounted Birds and Mammals (Bradford Museums). *Biology Curators Group Newsletter*, *Vol 1 No 10*, 8 - 12.

URL: http://www.natsca.org/article/1600

from Yorkshire (the rest being mainly from Lancashire and North Wales). A few specimens were collected by James Needham.

While searching in vain for the herbaria of King, Gibson and Leyland in the attics of the old Belle Vue Museum I did find a single small collection of vascular plants. These were presented to the museum by a Colonel Akroyd and were collected by numerous people, in particular by J. Ward, and also by such eminent botanists as Dr. Hooker. There are 81 sheets in all, mainly dating from 1821 to 1841 and being from all parts of the British Isles, with only 13 sheets of local specimens. A further folder with 9 sheets of plants collected between 1852 and 1868 was also found. These specimens were all collected from the Halifax area but bear no collectors name.

Finally, we have a small collection of vascular plants made in 1966 and 1967 by my predecessor, Mr. R. Penrose. There are 76 sheets of vascular plants all of which are from the Halifax region. I hope to be able to continue and enlarge this collection in the future.

P. M. Earland-Bennett
Calderdale Museums Service, Halifax.

- - - - - - - - - - - - -

STORAGE OF MOUNTED BIRDS AND MAMMALS (Bradford Museums)

The problems faced in Bradford in 1974 were:-

1. two museums' collections of mainly British mounted birds and mammals (nothing larger than a swan or fox) to be amalgamated and safely stored for future use. Many specimens were already uncased; others needed rescuing from cases in poor condition; and some were in better cases, sound or repairable and fit for future display.

2. storage space in various sized, irregularly shaped rooms on the first floor of a former workhouse, without a lift, and with many windows, poor insultation, bare floor-boards, and central heating pipes and radiators round most walls.

3. no written record or catalogue for many of the specimens.

4. a need for mounts to be readily available for temporary exhibitions in three museum buildings.

5. a need to sort through all existing material to determine its future.

(a) for display in 'permanent' or 'temporary' exhibitions
(b) for loans to schools (suitably boxed by the Museums Education Service)
(c) for handling in classroom areas
(d) for reference (e.g. local specimens of locally unusual or rare species, mounted and not of sufficient quality for future display).

6. Limited finance and staff time.

Bradford's solution was to store specimens in sound cases (fit for future display) in one room with the windows blacked out; and to create dust-proof boxes or storage units inside two of the rooms to take the already uncased material, material from damaged or poor cases, and unsound cases which one did not wish to dismantle or destroy for some reason (e.g. examples of work of local taxidermists; or a good setting). The bulk of sorting was done by curatorial staff with help in cataloguing from a vacation student. A card index was compiled, one card per specimen, with all the available information on the card and also on a new standard label fixed to the specimen, so that specimens dealt with could be readily identified as work progressed.

The curatorial specifications for these units were:-

(a) as many uncased specimens as possible should be able to be stored in the two rooms available.

(b) specimens should be mounted on bases suitable for storage and also for transporting in a van from the store to various museum buildings for display.

(c) no daylight should be admitted to the units, but sufficient electric light to be available for staff to put in and take out specimens.

(d) the units should be dust-proof - so that specimens do not require polythene or other covers which can bend feathers, etc - and so at least partially pest-proof, with fumigation with a Rentokil smoke generator (Lindane 10) to be carried out at regular intervals to guard against pests introduced with specimens and staff.

(e) humidity should be kept down to acceptable levels (55-60 RH); and temperature control to be viewed from its effect on RH as staff were not expected to work for any length of time in the units, and previous recordings in the room showed that temperature did not rise to unacceptably high levels, whereas humidity did (70-80 RH).

(f) there should be ready access to all specimens at all times for visual checks and removal for display.

The storage units were designed by J. Rogers (Conservation Assistant) and built by him, with the assistance of an attendant in the quieter winter months, from materials purchased with a 45% Area Service grant.

Each unit has a framework of 3" x 2" sawn timber, clad externally with foil-backed plasterboard and internally with 1" pegboard. The floors of the units are formed from hardboard pinned to the original floor-boards to prevent dust rising from the old floor.

The framework for each side was constructed separately and eventually the four sides were bolted together and screwed to the floor. The ceiling supports and internal shelving uprights were then added. Before the plasterboard cladding was fixed, felt strips were glued onto the framework to form a dust-proof seal where the boards butt-jointed.

After the cladding was completed light fittings and a Westair D50 dehumidifier were installed, the internal shelving finished, and the pegboard cladding fixed inside. The shelving (two tiers) comes up to the wall between the two doors and runs down the centre of the room, leaving a corridor at the end furthest from the doors, i.e. it forms an island in the centre of the unit, abutting onto the wall between the doors. This provides shelving for especially heavy or awkward specimens, and also for the cases needing repair to make them dust-proof. Three walls are thus completely clear for fixing specimens to the pegboard, and this can also be done above and to one side of each door. The two doors were fixed using draught excluder as a seal and ordinary draw bolts as fasteners.

Diagrams 1 and 3 indicate the size and timber structure. Sufficient space was left between the walls of the building, central heating pipes, etc. and the unit to allow free air circulation and staff to be able to get round the room for maintenance.

Specimens were prepared for the unit by a joiner (employed for a fixed number of hours per year through the Area Service with a 45% grant) guided, and assisted where the actual specimen was affected, by the Natural Sciences Technician (taxidermy). Specimens are fixed on a base - a rectangular or square piece of wood, blockboard, etc. (offcuts, scrap pieces, etc. have been successfully used to save cost) cut slightly larger than the specimen so that it does not come in contact with the pegboard when stored and a stable base is provided while the specimen is being transported, bases packing firmly on the floor one against the other without specimens coming in contact.

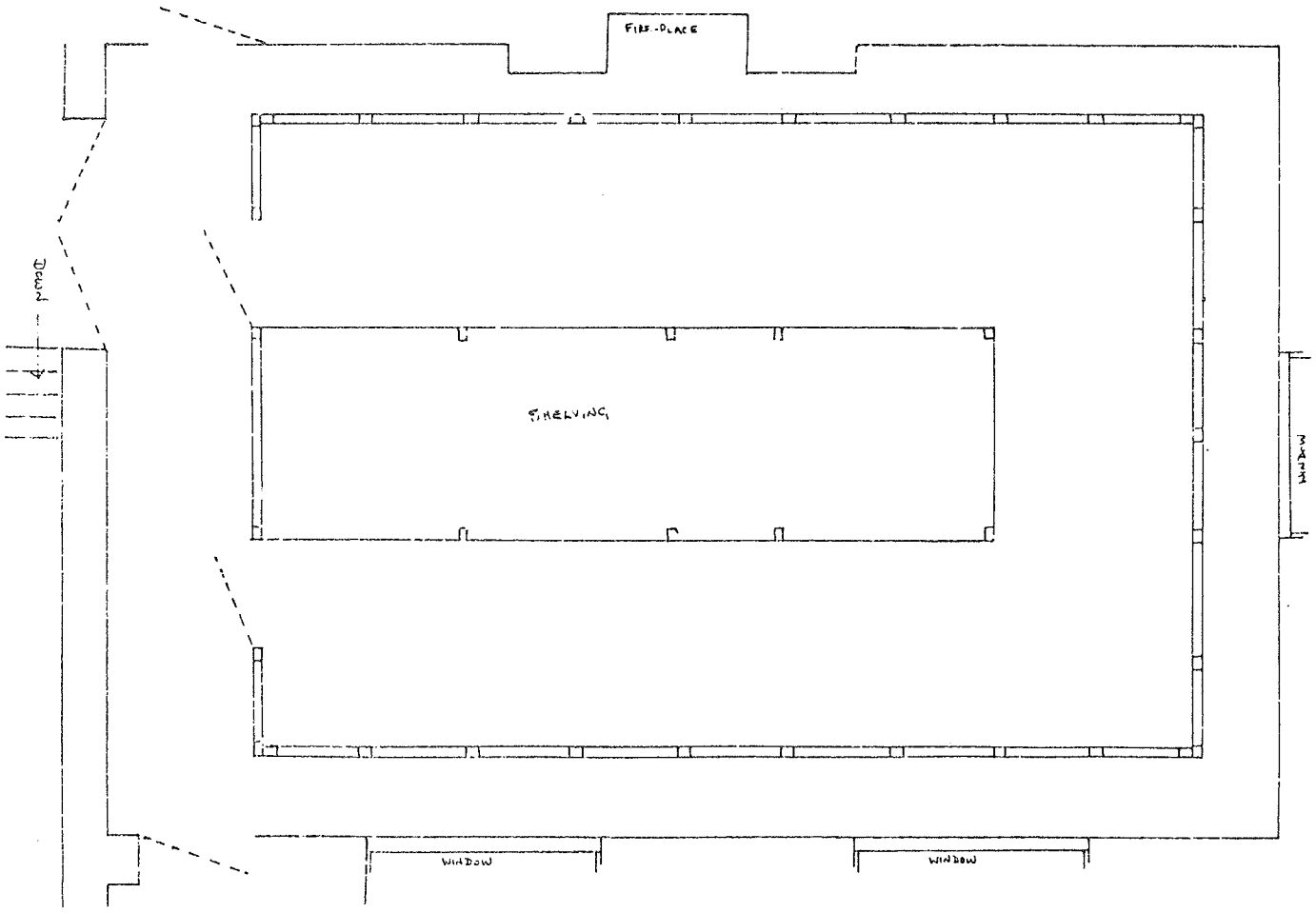
While these bases can be painted a standard colour and the specimens displayed on them, in Edmonds' cases for example, in practice we have found that the

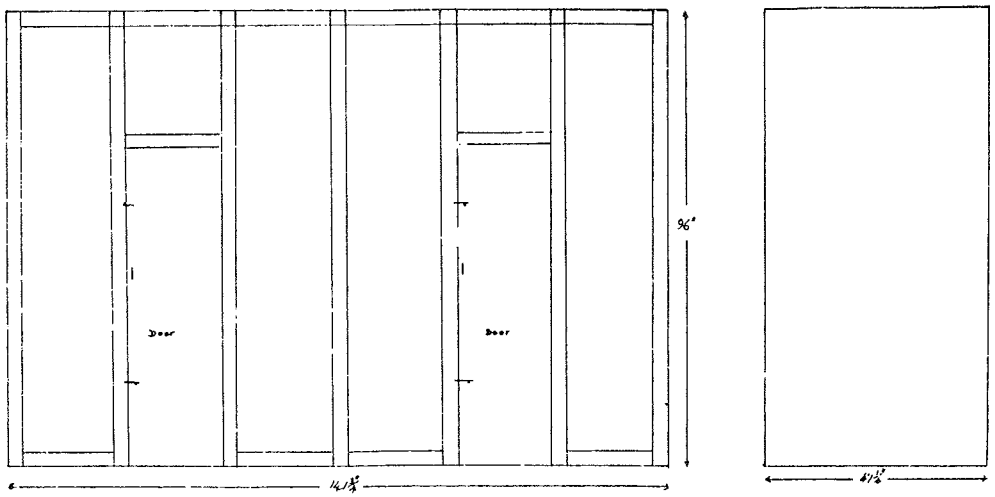
specimens are often taken off and put in a more natural setting. Wherever possible a specimen on a twig, 'rock', or other setting is fastened onto the storage base by a couple of screws and can easily be unscrewed when put into a display. At least one straight edge is required on the storage base so it can be pushed right up against the pegboard, and four straight edges make packing for travel easiest. Holes are drilled in one long edge of the base to take the supporting pegs (Diagram 3).

The specimens are put in their storage position in the unit (we use roughly the BTO checklist order for birds) by hooking two pegs, made specially by a local firm for £95 per 2,000 (Diagram 4) in appropriate positions in the pegboard and sliding the specimen base, previously drilled with holes of the appropriate size, onto the shanks of pegs. A third, central peg is used for larger, heavier specimens (e.g. Buzzard), but ducks, owls, etc. have been held firmly by two pegs only. As a specimen can be moved in 1" units in any direction it is possible to pack a large number of variable-sized specimens easily into a relatively small space. At present there are 170 in one unit (Mammals, Divers to Pheasants) and 375 in the second (Rails to Crows). Space remains for more of the old material and any new mounts not required for immediate display. The first unit has now been operating for over eighteen months with no problems.

Margaret M. Hartley
J. Rogers

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -





Front elevation

Plasterboard Sheet

Diagram 1

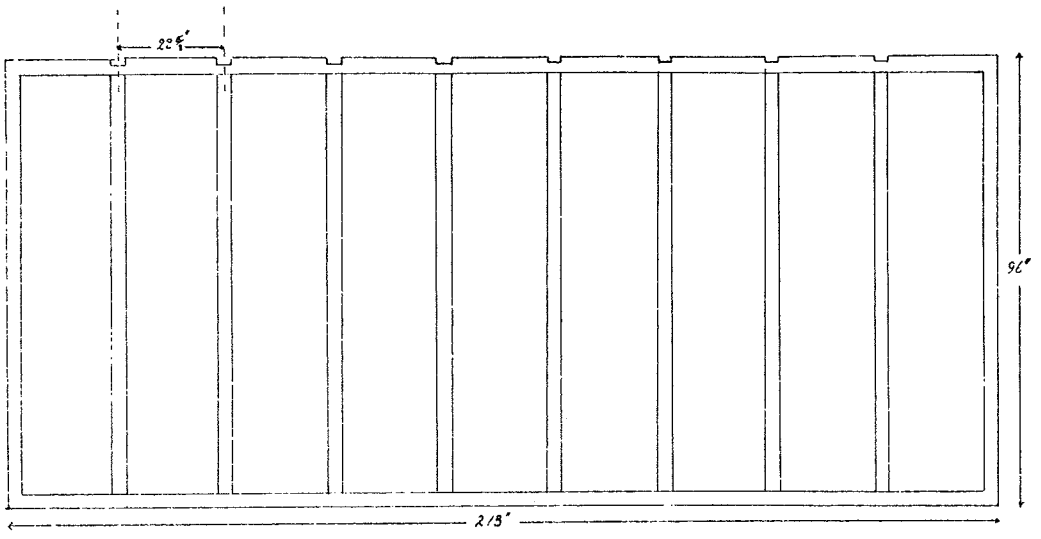


Diagram 2

Side elevation

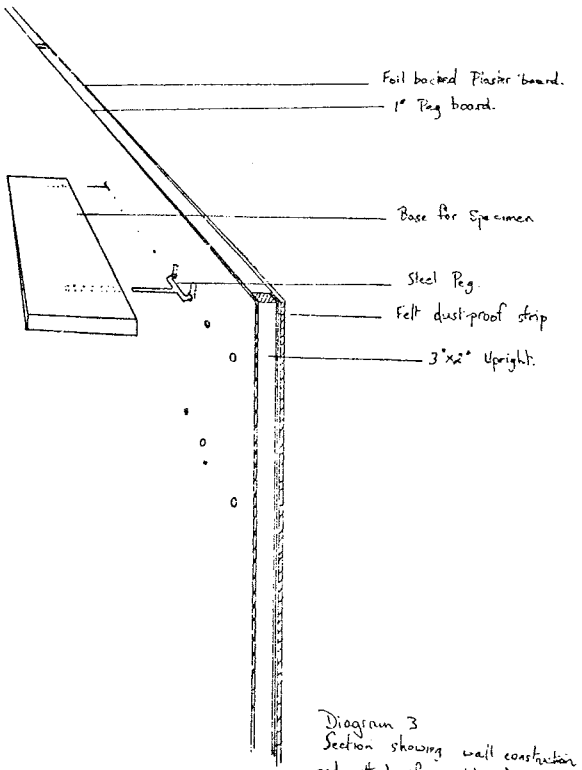


Diagram 3
Section showing wall construction and method of mounting bases.

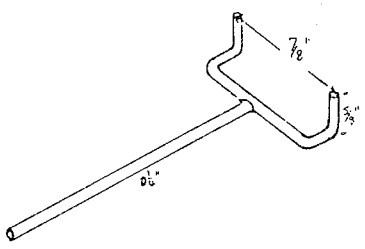


Diagram 4