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REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE BIOLOGY CURATORS GROUP
HELD AT MANCHESTER MUSEUM, 1st DECEMBER 1978.

Despite freezing fog and sub zero temperatures, BCG members struggled to the comparative warmth of Manchester Museum on December 1st.

The meeting was divided into two sessions, the first an explanation of the computerisation work being undertaken at Manchester Museum by Bill Pettitt, the second a discussion of several points raised by Graham Walley at the last AGM (see BCG Newsletter No. 8 p.30) covering a number of topics. The following is an account of the meeting prepared from the Editors hurried notes of the sessions.

THE WONDERFUL THING ABOUT COMPUTERS IS.....

Bill Pettitt explained the progress made to date on the computerisation of the Spence Collection at Manchester, and the pilot projects on collections of birds, spiders, aphids, archaeology and data collected by the North West Collection Research Unit. Favourable comments were directed at GOS, which had been revealed to all at an M. D. A. Seminar at Duxford in October.

Implementation of GOS outside Cambridge is to take place at Manchester in the near future, with financial assistance from the North West Area Museums Service being used to employ a person to supervise the implementation of GOS and the language BCPL.

The composition of UMRCC was explained, and the feasibility of establishing links between other computer centres and Manchester described. In this way GOS can be made available to other museums in Great Britain.

The stages in computing data were explained, with particular reference to the Manchester experience and man hours involved. This is summarised below (time (hours) indicated per batch of 50 records)

<u>Phase 1</u>		<u>Phase 2</u>		<u>Phase 3</u>
Code data onto sheet	Punch →	Input Listfile Call check Edit	→	Test index Errors, Vocab Edit Repeat
8.00	0.05	0.05 0.05 4.00 1.00		0.05 0.5 0.25 0.20

<u>Phase 4</u>		<u>Phase 5</u>
Second Card Check	—————→	Major concordance Edits
Magnetic Tapes		Desired output
0.05		2.8
0.05		

Total man hours/50 records = 18, or a possible achievement of approximately 4500 records/person/year (the operation can be split between Curator, Coder and computer operator.)

With the success of the project evident, Bill Pettitt went on to describe the next stage, the implementation of a 20 person M.S. C. scheme to computerise varied collections (flints, roman pots, shells, spiders, liverworts, ammonites etc) in the Manchester Museum.

A number of handouts were made available to BCG members at the meeting, including a note on the M.S. C. scheme, minutes of the meetings of NWCRU, collections data coding forms, a list of liaison officers at University Computing Centres (for links to GOS at Manchester) and a sample of raw data as input to the computer. Copies of these are available from Bill Pettitt at Manchester Museum.

AFTERNOON SESSION

This followed the lunchtime session, and a lively discussion interrupted by the occasional perambulation resulted. Graham Walley spoke briefly on the proposals put forward to the last A. G. M. and comments were made regarding the following issues:

a) Development of conventions for the M. D. A. Natural History card. The availability of past and present M.S. C. schemes had provided biology curators with an ideal opportunity to catalogue their collections, but an essential prerequisite to this was the development of conventions regarding keywords - a control vocabulary. Undoubtedly various museums had adopted their own internal conventions, but agreed standards were required at a national level, and the view was expressed that M. D. A. should have dictated terminology to ensure compatibility of records (n.b. 1. the Editor would be pleased to receive any article relating to adopted internal conventions for the Natural History card 2. Bill Pettitt has agreed to write an article for the next BCG newsletter on this issue).