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Symposium Towards a Code of Ethics

This meeting was arranged by the Museum Professionals' Group (née Museum Assistants' Group) on the 3rd April 1981 at the Geological Museum, London. The aim was to bring to the attention of a wider audience the current dilemma with regard to the "Guidelines for Professional Conduct" which appear in the Museums Yearbook. These guidelines were originally adapted from a more comprehensive set and were for discussion only but since publication have been used by some employing authorities as a set of "rules".

The background to Ethics in museum spheres was given and the current state of play in both this country and the United States. It is interesting to note that the natural history discipline was for many years the only one to consider problems and foresee complications. In the late nineteenth century T. D. A. Cockerell, a north American entomologist, was the first to point out in print the ethical considerations involved in the maintenance of private collections by publicly employed scientists in charge of specimens. In most cases the introduction of laws preceded the ethics of collecting as in the various protection of birds legislations. On an international scale the ICOM Natural History committee resolved to produce a code of ethics for natural history museums well before there was any move by those in charge of cultural objects.

The net result of the papers read at the meeting and the discussion afterwards was that, following publication by the MAG of the transcripts, the Museums Association will be asked again to consider producing a set of Guidelines which have been considered more widely and fully.

V O T E T R E S I S E

Those members who are also eligible to vote in the Museums Association Council elections may consider putting a cross next to Dr. Geoff Tresise's name on the ballot paper. This will help increase natural science representation on Council - Geoff is Keeper of Geology at Merseyside County Museum and Secretary of G.C.G.

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