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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Co-opted members:

Dave Erwin  
Ray Ingle  
Representatives for Scotland,  
Guild of Taxidermists, South East  
(for M. A. Conference).  
James Bateman

#### 4. Annual General Meeting

This has now been arranged for Tuesday 3rd April, 11 a.m., at the British Museum (Natural History).

#### 5. Treasurer's Report

Copies of the income and expenditure budget were circulated by the Treasurer and approved. It was agreed that additional revenue should be sought from advertising in the Newsletter. Geoff Stansfield offered to follow this up, and seek a commitment from relevant manufacturers.

#### 6. Editor's Report

The Editor indicated that provided copy is received on time, an issue should be produced in time for the April Symposium.

#### 7. Museums Association Conference

Discussion took place on the arrangements for the specialist session day. It was agreed that the morning session involve a visit to Cumberland House and site visit, and the afternoon session centre around 'natural history collections and leisure'. Speakers from varied institutions, including the B. M. (N. H. ), would be approached by the Chairman.

P. Davis

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### THE HERBARIUM - LEICESTERSHIRE MUSEUMS SERVICE

Before 1895 the Leicester Town Museum had a miscellaneous

collection of plant specimens, totalling about 3,000, but these were not organised into a herbarium as we know it today. After 1895 however, an active policy of collecting plants and keeping them as a well-ordered part of the Museum Service has resulted in the large provincial-museum collection which we have now.

In about 1895, a programme of collecting voucher material to support the 1886 Flora of Leicestershire was undertaken with the aid of two volunteers, namely Mr. A. B. Jackson and Reverend T. A. Preston. These workers also founded the Herbarium of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, which was housed within the Museum but kept separately from the Museum herbarium. The first curator with Botanical interests to be permanently appointed was A. R. Horwood in 1902, who built-up the collections to about 25000 by the time of his departure in 1922. The distinction between the Town Museum and Leicester Lit. & Phil. herbaria was still maintained, and indeed, this state of affairs continued until a transfer agreement was formalised in 1949, whereby the Museum took charge of all Botanical collections within the buildings. Horwood was responsible for housing much of the voucher material for the 1933 Flora of Leicestershire. From 1922, despite the appointment of a series of curators, namely G. J. V. Bemrose (1922-1930), R. Wagstaffe (1930-1934), and C. J. Lane (1934-1946) with the assistance of M. E. Usher during the wartime period, and her continuance as Keeper until 1949, the herbarium was quiescent. A major change took place in 1947 when the Botany Section was merged with Zoology to become the Biology Section, under the Keepership of T. A. Walden with the consequent loss of a permanent Botanical curator. This situation prevailed until 1974, when the post of Assistant Keeper in Botany was introduced, and Dr. D. C. Lindsay, a lichenologist, was appointed. He was replaced by C. H. G. Scotter in 1976, and upon the latter's resignation, the author, again a lichenologist, was appointed in 1978.

Despite the lack of permanent staff from 1947, the Botanical collections increased during the post-war period, particularly after 1959 when I. M. Evans took over as Keeper of Biology. During this latter period, the collections increased to the present approximate number of 100,000; a four-fold increase since the time of Horwood. This acceleration in the number of specimens acquired may be attributed to the deliberate policy of collecting voucher material to support the coming Flora of Leicestershire expected in 1980 and the acquisition of collections of special interest from the point of view of their scientific or historical importance, large size or good state of preservation. The bias throughout however, has always been towards (1) Leicestershire and Rutland material, (2) a reference collection of British species and introduced aliens, and (3) Cryptogamic plants from world-wide sources. At present, non-British vascular plants entering the Museum are loaned to the University of Leicester Herbarium, but non-British Cryptogams are acquired because of the scarcity of herbaria of good quality outside those of the major national museums.

A brief account of the major plant groups represented in the Leicester Herbarium is as follows.

### FUNGI

These collections are fairly small, totalling about 3500 specimens. The mainstay is the 1200 specimens of freeze-dried Agaricales obtained from D. A. L. Davies. This collection is of some historical interest as it was produced during the evolution by Davies of this fungal preservation technique. All specimens are from southern England and were collected during the 1950's and 1960's. An active policy of acquiring Leicestershire fungi is now under way and is supported by donations from local Mycologists. Specimens are kept in both air-dried and freeze-dried conditions.

Of particular interest is the Myxomycete collection of about 1000 boxed or slide-preparations. Most of these unusual plants were collected by F. A. Sowter and K. Higgins, and come from Leicestershire, southern England and the U.S. A. All were redetermined recently by B. Ing.

### ALGAE

As with Fungi, these collections are fairly small and number about 2000. The larger, marine algae are poorly represented, but by old specimens dating from early last century. There are larger collections of Desmids and microalgae preserved on microscope slides by F. Bates and G. A. Mitchell, often of Leicestershire material. Several hundred sheets of Charophyta are also available from the collections of C. R. Billups.

### BRYOPHYTES

This section of the herbarium is especially rich and contains about 7000 packets from many parts of the world. The collections of A. R. Horwood, H. P. Reader and F. A. Sowter form the bulk, but there are also many early gatherings by other collectors from unusual localities, for example, by J. Nowell from the Todmorden area in 1850-1865, and a problem collection from Devon, dated 1821 which includes the initials of an unidentified collector "M. A. D.", possibly Miss Dale of Heavitree near Exeter.

Much of the Leicester material supports the flora of Sowter (1945) and includes many early records, notably those of Reverend A. Bloxam.

## LICHENS

This section is again of especial interest, partly because many of the Museum curators have been specialists in this group or because the richness of the collection has encouraged further donations by amateurs and specialists. The 10,000 specimens originate from most parts of the world, with most of Europe, U.S. A. and Antarctica being especially well represented. Collectors include Reverend A. Bloxam, the discoverer for the first time in Britain of the now ubiquitous Lecanora conizaeoides, W. H. Pearson, A. R. Horwood, H. P. Reader, W. Watson, A. E. Wade, D. L. Hawksworth, D. C. Lindsay and many foreign specialists. The herbarium houses the large collection of F. A. Sowter, supporting his Flora of 1950. Many exsiccati are present, with some isotypes and at least one record of international interest, namely Acarospora rufescens which was otherwise only known from the holotype gathering. The lichen collections will soon be increased by duplicates from the author's herbarium of British seashore specimens.

## VASCULAR PLANTS

About 60,000 plants are present, with the earliest being dated 1795. Most of the collection is of local interest providing voucher specimens for the various Floras. However, an extensive collection of British Reference Plants is also housed and probably most of the British Flora can be inspected here. Some Foreign exsiccati, notably Tiselius's Swedish Potamogeton and specimens from the old Botanical Exchange Club are also held.

Some rare or interesting plants include Inula britannica, known only from a Leicester location within Britain and now extinct, Polygonum cuspidatum, an alien first recorded from Leicestershire in 1908, and Epilobium adenocaulon which is apparently the first British record of a plant now widespread throughout Britain. The herbarium has a number of bound collections, some of scientific interest, while others, lacking locality data, are of aesthetic or historical interest, reflecting the interests of the collector. Associated with the Herbarium is a bank of historical data chiefly pertaining to local botanists but of interest to all.

Dr. A. Fletcher  
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Leicestershire Museums

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