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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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best and most appropriate advisors on the interpretation requirements of the country.

Be it resolved that the International Committee of Natural History Museums of ICOM establish with IUCN a small working group to define methods and undertake pilot projects for co-operative museum based activities aimed at enhancing public understanding of ecology and conservation and to report its findings through the committee's newsletter and bring for discussion at the next meeting of the committee in Mexico City in 1980.

#### Resolution 9

- a) Desiring to develop a world wide code of ethics for Natural History Museums,
- b) Recognising that few facts are available regarding present codes of ethics (if any), that already exist in the world's natural history museums.

Be it resolved that in so far as is possible, the Natural History Museums Committee of ICOM inquire about the present status of ethics codes for the world's natural history museums and further that the committee develop a world wide code of ethics for all natural history museums.

#### Resolution 10

- a) In as much as one of the handicaps in the development of Natural History Museums in the developing nations of the Asian and South East Asian Region is the shortage of technically trained personnel,

Be it resolved that the Natural History Committee of ICOM recommend to ICOM to recommend to UNESCO to consider the possibility of organising a Regional Training Centre for Natural History Museum personnel in Asia.

G. Stansfield,  
May 1979

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#### ONE-MAN BAND

At the March AGM, I wondered how long it would be before the Buckinghamshire County Museum was asked to contribute to the

'area' theme, and I have not had to wait long. However, I regret I am unable to write about the history of the museum collections or their collectors as other contributors to this series have done, though this article will explain why.

I, alone, am the entire staff of the Botany, Zoology and Geology Departments - a Jack of all trades and master of none. I began as the Educational Assistant as well, transporting models around the countryside, but gladly relinquished that after a few years. Every museum activity has (in theory) to be covered by me, from feeding the livestock and topping up the naphtha, to providing for research workers and locating site data for enquirers.

I started in 1963 with a collection which had been left unattended since the last Curator interested in natural history had died 20 years before. My first job was to create a natural history gallery and, with no academic institution to satisfy, we settled for the needs of children and shoppers, in the hope that we could encourage them to be more observant in the countryside and therefore more concerned for wildlife conservation. I did a little fieldwork to acquire some knowledge of the distribution of species in Buckinghamshire, obtained enough mounted specimens to look good, and made many buckets-full of papier-mache to prepare six display cases. These show different habitats to be found in the county, with the right species and stages of development to represent a particular month of the year. Two 'topic' cases gave an opportunity to use larger animals and ease the storage problem. Just before the gallery was due to be opened, we concentrated on geology and, in a hotel bedroom during a diploma course, I prepared the maps and labels. These went into a tiny gallery with just room for two cases of local fossils and one of local rocks and their uses. At the opening ceremony (by a grand-daughter of Charles Darwin, who lived locally), a wood-boring beetle emerged from a fumigated piece of dead wood and settled on the head of the coypu.

Once it was open, there was an influx of 'things' to identify, lessons to be prepared to school parties and loan service boxes of local interest e.g. snails of Chiltern Downland and fossils from the Aylesbury limestone to be made. We started a Holiday Club, which has become a success, so that now there is no rest from children. With Environmental Studies in their heyday, I prepared displays for several local centres, wrote nature trails, taught in the field, answered teachers' enquiries on sites suitable for fieldwork and suggested projects to do there. I had come to know many local naturalists and to be known so that telephone calls, requests for talks and involvement with several committees was inevitable and has never let up.

When I got round to the collections half of the specimens were a green pin, a pile of dust and no label, the animal having ended up on a different bit of the food chain to what it anticipated. The rest were

put in a recognisable order and I began to fill in IRGMA cards. I was glad of volunteer help for this gargantuan task, but it proved to be false economy as I know some mistakes have been made (though keepers have been known to make them as well). However, the Buckinghamshire material is catalogued after a fashion, the non-Bucks being still an unknown quantity. (I have often cherished a hope that County Museums could do some swapping of non-collection material, and return the specimens to their native land, for instance, I would find herbarium specimens from Bucks much more useful than fossils from the Bristol Channel). Long term care of the collections, especially chemical conservation of decaying fossils is a problem in an office with no laboratory facilities, and takes longer to do as a result.

Although this was and is my only experience of museum life, I had come from a place where we habitually recorded the distribution of plants and animals in the parish, and I extended this practice to cover the whole county of Buckinghamshire plus vice-county 24. Thus, we had an embryonic record centre before they were called such.

So, after fourteen years we have natural history galleries, an active teaching role, liaison with local people, volunteer helpers, additional collections given in the last few years, biological and geological record centres, very little time for fieldwork, certainly no time for 'research' or publications and very little hope of the extra staff I have long been asking for. It is a tall order for one person - I know of County Museum Services where many more are employed to cover this range of activities. This year we have a temporary zoologist and botanist under the government STEP scheme which is enabling the biological record system to be improved and it is good to have colleagues in one's own discipline to talk to. The need for a geologist was accepted by the Education Committee and put up as a policy option, but rejected on financial grounds.

With the bags of fossils from half-term still waiting to be identified and a project on mammal skulls to complete for the summer holiday club, I am quite sure I am not the only 'One-Man-Band' in a County Museum Service where daily 'interruptions' are a full-time job. I probably speak for many when I say I am very conscious of all the jobs which do not get done - the temporary geological exposures we fail to record or collect from, the inadequacy of the biological site data, the galleries needing a spring clean, the need of conservation for specimens etc etc... and finally, the research into the collections which would make a useful contribution to the BCG newsletter.

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