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Among the more recent holdings, are some specimens from S. T. Jermyn (1907-73) author of the current flora of Essex, whose main herbarium is unfortunately in the Smithsonian Institute Washington, U.S.A., and B. T. Ward plus the herbarium formed by J.M. Betts as part of her degree studies.

We are currently expanding this area of the herbaria paying particular attention to alien and escaped plants and critical species groups such as Burdocks (the local flora is unreliable due to changes in the species concept within the group and we are, with the help of local societies, examining all the populations of the plant in North East Essex).

With the help of the Botanical Group of the Colchester Natural History Society, we have instigated a mapping project for Dittander (Lepidium latifolium) which has extended its known distribution considerably in this area during the two years that it has been running. These schemes, as well as a survey of local woods, are continuing and yield valuable data for the biological data bank held at the Museum.

J. J. Heath
Keeper of Natural History

The Invertebrate Collections at the Colchester and Essex Museum

Most of Colchester Museum's store of invertebrates comprises insect cabinets, and most of these, not surprisingly, hold macrolepidoptera. Between collectors, the British species of butterflies and moths are well covered.

The principal Lepidoptera collections are described below under the name of the collector.

MACROLEPIDOPTERA

A.D. Blaxill - a large and locally important collection which was donated to the Museum in 1977. Most of Blaxill's specimens were obtained between 1930 and 1950. He specialised in breeding British butterflies and produced many fine series which are housed with his moths at Colchester. Of particular note is a series of Large Tortoiseshells.

D. Baker - another large and comprehensive collection of macrolepidoptera. Baker lived in Essex and collected moths and butterflies from London and the home counties for a considerable part of his life, from 1900 to the 1950's. Each specimen is labelled with a code which refers to diaries now in the care of Colchester Museum.

Collection from Bury St. Edmunds - no one seems to know for sure who the collector of this holding is. Colchester took the collection on loan from Bury St. Edmunds in 1976, and since then only one clue has emerged as to its origins. A label under specimens of aberrant magpie moths (Abraxis grossularia) refers to a paper written for "The Entomologist" in December 1903. With the help of Tony Irwin at Norwich Castle Museum (who produced the relevant volume) and Howard Mendel of Ipswich we concluded that these specimens may have belonged to Mr. E. G. J. Sparke of Tooting, London. The handwriting on other labels is very similar to that of Sparke's description of these specimens and his reference to "The Entomologist". It is quite possible therefore that much of the collection belonged to him.

Many of the specimens were acquired in Surrey, Kent and East Anglia, but a number of other localities are represented. Also included in this collection are specimens collected by W. Harwood, a professional local entomologist (1840-1917).

W. P. Seabrook - This collection was acquired in 1978 on a twenty year loan from the Seabrook family. W. P. Seabrook lived in Great Baddow, near Chelmsford, in Essex, and collected Lepidoptera from widespread localities. He was most active in this between 1930 and 1950, taking mostly butterflies and larger moths, but there are some microlepidoptera amongst his specimens now at Colchester. The Museum also has the use of correspondence, drawings, records and notes from his collecting period.

Wood - one cabinet of assorted insects, mostly macrolepidoptera; British butterflies and moths and some foreign Lepidoptera, Odonata, Orthoptera and Coleoptera are included. The collection was purchased by Colchester Museum in 1972. Specimens were collected from various sites in Britain, although not many specimens have locality data with them.

Gervaise F. Mathew - Colchester possesses a small part of the collection of this Victorian Essex naturalist, who discovered Mathew's Wainscot (Leucania favicolor). There are 48 species of British butterflies represented, 50 species of the larger British moths, and 3 species of microlepidoptera. The remainder of the surviving collection is in the care of the British Museum (Natural History).

C. Nield - this collection was acquired on loan in 1979. Nield lived in Essex and many of his specimens are local, but there were other collecting localities, including Uppingham, the New Forest, Cromer and Aberdeen. He carried out most of his collecting during the first half of this century. The larger moths are housed in two cabinets and the butterflies in one small cabinet.

Shillitoe - some specimens from a collection of South European macrolepidoptera acquired in 1961. The rest is housed at the British Museum (Natural History).

Joe Firmin - three drawers of larger moths and butterflies which include specimens of some local and rare species. Joe Firmin is still an active Essex lepidopterist.

W. Temple (see below) - a few drawers of British Geometridae which were part of a larger collection of Lepidoptera by Temple, and which came with his collection of Coleoptera to the Museum.

Humphrey - a small collection of mainly British Macrolepidoptera, with some foreign specimens amongst them. The British specimens were collected from Hampshire, Norfolk, Sussex and Cambridgeshire between 1940 and 1950. Humphrey's collection came to Colchester Museum in 1971.

MICROLEPIDOPTERA

A small collection of local microlepidoptera has been built up at Colchester by the Museum staff. These specimens remain to be identified however.

COLEOPTERA

There are two significant collections at Colchester Museum.

William Temple (also see above) - an important and useful local collection. Temple collected from about 1900 to 1940, and produced a large double cabinet of mainly Essex specimens, with a few insects from Bedford. All are fully labelled and in systematic order. He also obtained specimens from other collectors, namely Tomlin, J. J. Walker, Champion, Merrin, Hadfield (a local dealer) and W. W. Fowler who wrote what was for a long time a standard reference work on Coleoptera.

A. D. L. Cox - Mr. Cox's wife gave his collection to the Museum in 1967. It is at present housed in 16 store boxes. Although there were no field notes accompanying the collection the majority of specimens are well labelled. Most of the collection consists of Essex specimens, but other sites were visited in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Devon, Nottinghamshire, Hampshire, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Kent. The 1940's and 1950's were the time of greatest accumulation.

Cox wrote a paper on beetles of the Colchester area which appeared in "The Entomologists" monthly magazine on June 30th, 1950, and which was based on specimens in his collection.

ODONATA

J. Firmin (see above) - Firmin collected some dragonflies and damselflies from Essex. Other unlabelled dragonflies are to be found amongst Wood's collection (see above), and the Museum itself acquires Essex specimens through enquiry and fieldwork.

ORTHOPTERA and DIPTERA

Colchester has a few specimens of Orthoptera and Diptera (Syrphidae), collected by A. M. Hutson of the British Museum (Natural History) in the 1960's and presented by Mr. Andrew Low. These were collected from the New Forest, Dorset and Surrey.

OTHER INSECT ORDERS

The Museum staff, with the help of Colchester Natural History Society, are busily collecting insects other than Macrolepidoptera in an effort to build up a more representative entomological store for north east Essex. As yet, many have not been identified, but some inroads have been made this year with the bugs (Heteroptera). Most of those collected so far have been provisionally identified, but still need to be checked.

ARACHNIDA

Spiders

These are represented at Colchester by a small collection of local spiders made by Shane Parker in the 1960's, and some specimens collected and identified by Robert Strauchan from Friday Woods near Colchester. The Parker specimens have had all their identifications confirmed by the British Museum (Natural History).

Pseudoscorpions

The nucleus of a reference collection has been gathered together over the past year.

Other arachnids (mites, ticks, harvestmen) are at present collected on a random basis from Essex localities, and are largely unidentified. All are liquid preserved.

MOLLUSCA

There are some molluscs from the first Colchester Natural History Society collections, dating from the late 19th century, now at the Museum. Most have data. Other molluscs are those specimens collected by museum staff over the past 20 years, or the remains of a once world wide collection which was sold commercially, and which is poorly documented.

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

There are small collections by museum staff of Coelenterates, Platyhelminthes, Nematodes, Annelids, Crustaceans, Molluscs, Echinoderms and Tunicates which are mostly preserved in propylene phenoxetol. A proportion of these have been identified. The nearby Writtle Agricultural College have also given the Museum a mixed collection of liquid-preserved specimens. These have little data as they were for use as teaching material.

Two collections of documents should be mentioned here, although they do not complement any specimen material in the Museum. One consists of field notes, diaries and journals once belonging to Mr. F. Buck, a prominent British Coleopterist who lived in Essex for some time and contributed a great deal to our knowledge of local beetles. He was author of one of the Handbooks for the Identification of British Insects, published by the Royal Entomological Society.

Colchester also has books and offprints once belonging to Rev. J. E. Hull, the noted Arachnologist. His specimens of spiders and mites, which were once at Colchester Museum, were passed to Oxford University, the mites eventually going to the British Museum (Natural History).

Back-up information to the invertebrate collections is gradually being added to the Biological Records System here, and a distribution map file for Essex biological records is currently under way. There is also a card index of macrolepidoptera records which formed the basis of "The Butterflies and Larger Moths of Essex", published by Essex Naturalists' Trust in 1975. The Natural History Department is fortunate in possessing a large and growing library, and also has a substantial collection of slides. These include photographs of Lepidoptera taken by William Temple's son in the 1950's and 1960's.

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