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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: On the virtues of an "Expendable Dump"

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Source: McMillan, N. F. (1982). On the virtues of an "Expendable Dump". *Biology Curators Group Newsletter*, Vol 3 No 2, 126.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1472>

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On the virtues of an "Expendable Dump"

An "expendable dump" is museum natural history material which is superfluous, either because it lacks all documentation or is in very poor condition. I have had such a "dump" of Mollusca for some years and it is quite astonishing how often it is called upon to supply specimens. Specimens for artists to draw and for schoolchildren to examine and handle (it does not matter if the specimens get broken or lost). I have also been asked for "tiny shells" for making collages, "large shells" for flower arrangements and "pretty shells" for ornaments.

For more strictly scientific purposes various large bivalves are requested in order to show students different sorts of hingelines and internal markings, and gastropods demonstrate the phenomenon of dextral and sinistral shells. Really delapidated shells can usefully be broken into bits so that the fragments can be used to help identify fragments from Holocene or Pleistocene deposits.

In short, an expendable dump of Mollusca obviates much wear-and-tear upon the reserve collections and is an invaluable adjunct to the department.

Lest historically-oriented colleagues rush to point out how important it is to make quite sure that nothing of possible value is discarded, I must state categorically that only after a most thorough "screening" is anything relegated to the "expendable dump".

The "expendable dump" in the Mollusca section of Merseyside County Museums is sorted roughly into marine gastropods, marine bivalves, land and freshwater gastropods and freshwater bivalves, all British. Extra-British material is similarly classified.

Nora F. McMillan,
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Liverpool.

8 January 1982.

THERE ARE SHELLS AND SHELLS

When I worked at Towneley Hall Art Gallery & Museums, Burnley I remember seeing an entry in the old inventory which listed a "Fragment of a shell from the Franco-Prussian War" - under 'Natural History' ! Which may not be so odd because here at Perth the registers contain the following entry "8 shells found in a ruined house at Diekebush, a few miles east of Ypres (Murex, Mitra, Oliva, Pteroceras). Got while the house was still being shelled by the Germans 1916. Pte Morrison, 3rd Black Watch" - How's that for enthusiastic collecting (or is it looting ?).

M A Taylor
Perth Museum & Art Gallery