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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Chairman's Report for 1982

In the report for 1981 (BCG Newsletter 3(2) 67-68 (1982)) I said that I thought that some members may feel that not much has happened and I feel that the same comments could be made again. However, your committee have long agendas and two meetings for members have been held. In addition, 3 issues of the BCG Newsletter have been published.

Early in the year a most successful meeting was held in conjunction with the AGM at Sheffield City Museum and I think all those who attended were impressed with the work carried out by the staff. In conjunction with the National Museum of Wales the BCG held in July a most important conference 'A National Plan for Systematic Collections'. As intended it brought together museum curators from a wide range of museums, as well as users of systematic collections. A few 'administrators' were also present but it was disappointing to find no representatives of the Office of Arts and Libraries, the Museums Association or the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

Nevertheless, the conference was a success with valuable contributions from abroad and the proceedings will be published in 1983. Already some informal comments have been made in the BCG Newsletter (vol. 3 pt. 4). I am also sure that the informal talks after dinner were as important as the formal sessions as it was in these that barriers, real or imaginary, began to fall apart.

For me I felt there were two important lessons to be learned. Firstly, I felt the conference demonstrated, as suspected, that many people from a wide range of organisations had similar interests in systematic collections and that they could all learn from each other. For example, I was enormously impressed by the work of the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux and the professionalism that was shown towards the curation of their collections. Secondly, it was important for organisations to define their roles. At present individual institutions do this independently but this is a waste of scarce resources. Duplication occurs and it seemed to me that increased collaboration between different kinds of institution could only be beneficial. From the point of view of local authority museums I felt that the conference made their staff look hard at what they were doing and indeed they were asked to define what they did best. Perhaps for smaller museums this conference with its emphasis on large scientifically important collections was depressing. However, this need not be so provided museums and the museums professions examine and define their roles and are prepared to collaborate closely with other organisations not calling themselves museums but which have deep interests in systematic collections. The importance of this kind of link cannot be over emphasised.

Clearly the BCG has continued its interest in the curation of natural history collections and it is hoped to reconvene the Cardiff conference in two or three years time when, perhaps, the results of the initiative taken by the Museums Association to appoint a researcher into natural history collections will be available.

As in previous years the work of the committee has been fully reported in the BCG Newsletter and a great deal of emphasis has been given to highlighting the problems facing collections. The heart of any museum is its collections but if natural history in museums is to develop we must demonstrate the value and use of the collections and other services offered by a museum to the public. This service aspect of a museum's work must not be undervalued and perhaps this leads back to the question of defining roles and demonstrating what each kind of museum can do best. Surely there is much to do with plenty of scope for future meetings of the Group and, of course, the committee will be pleased to consider any suggestions.

E. F. Greenwood

Meetings

Future Meetings

Harrison Zoological Museum and Reserve, Sevenoaks, Kent.
Saturday, 25th June 1983.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter two articles describe the history and work of the Museum and Reserve established by the Harrison family. As it is rather unusual for important natural history museums to be administered privately the BCG was pleased to accept the invitation of Dr. David Harrison to visit the Museum and Reserve. However, numbers must be limited to 30 people and prior booking is essential.

Programme

Meet Bowerwood House, St. Botolph's Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, at 9.45 a.m.
Lunch at the Riverhead, Sevenoaks 12.30-2.00 p.m. @ £1.10 per person.
Disperse 4.30 p.m.

The party will be split into two groups and each will visit the Museum and Reserve during the course of the day. The party will only be together as a single group for lunch.

Booking

Please send £1.10 to Dr. P.E.J. Wheatcroft, Keeper of Natural History, Horniman Museum and Library, London Road, Forest Hill, London, SE23 3PQ not later than Monday, 20th June 1983. Cheques should be made out to the Biology Curators' Group.

Please indicate when booking if you are travelling by car as a few cars will be needed for transport.