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BOOK REVIEW

WORLD PALAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

by R. J. Cleevely

1983: BM(NH) and Mansell, London, 365pp.

Price £50.00

BOOK NEWS AND REVIEWS



There has not been a book quite like this one before. A comparable work is Desmond's Dictionary of British and Irish botanists and horticulturalists although obviously the scope and emphasis are different. Whereas Desmond attacks the biographical/bibliographical nightmare purely as a biographical exercise (although much information on the location of collections is included), Cleevely is cataloguing the location of collections using the collectors' names as the retrieval point. Here, the similarity to the work of the British regional Collection Research Units becomes apparent. This publication is restricted though, to geological material on the one hand and unlimited by the geographical location of the institutions on the other.

Another comparison can be made with the recently published Natural History Manuscript Resources in the British Isles by Gavin Bridson, et. al. (reviewed in B.C.G. Newsletter, 2(10); pp.464-5), especially because the publishers, Mansell, have been involved with both books. This enables one to compare prices between the two ventures. "Manuscript Resources" a demy quarto 473 page book costs £97. "World Palaeontological Collections" is in the larger (A4) page size and uses smaller type face (10pt as opposed to 11pt). With more lines to a page the cost works out at almost exactly half that of the former and is more in line with the price of general reference works. If this is the result of jointly publishing with the Natural History Museum then they are to be congratulated in bringing the book within reasonable reach of the intended market.

Surely the first thing that everybody does with such a compendium is to turn to the entries relating to their own institution. Unless one has an infallible memory, or a small collection, the technique is to look in the institutional index which gives a cross reference to the individual collectors responsible for each collection entity. As a sampling method I have used it to assess the accuracy and comprehensiveness of an average entry. Typographical errors are perhaps to be expected in a work of this size and complexity, the problem obviously being in the onerous task of proof-reading. These are not excessive or likely to lead to misunderstanding. The most obvious anomaly which is immediately apparent is the arbitrary inclusion of mineralogical collections. Ron Cleevely states in his introduction that minerals are included, as indeed they are, whereas purely petrological collections are not. It is quite obvious, though, that the collections in the Register of Natural Science Collections in North West England indexed in that source as exclusively minerals are not all given entries. This leads to the rather odd reference to J. Frederick Neck, for example, credited for recent mollusca but not for his minerals, for which he is perhaps more relevant to the present work.

The introduction to the book is basically a statement on the method used and an honest assessment of the shortcomings of the compilation. The ambitious nature of the project means that although the amazing volume of entries is known to be incomplete, one can only admire the work in getting it to a state where it is worth publishing. (I cannot find an indication of the total number of entries and have estimated it as 4,900).

The aim now is to gather in additions, corrections and new entries and especially to cover certain parts of the world which are at present under-represented. A network of correspondents could conceivably fill this gap for the future. The fascination of this catalogue is as in a comprehensive dictionary. Whichever entry is examined, the ones next to it suddenly become more interesting. As an example, one could ask which named collections Professor J. F. Blake curated while in India (an enigmatic reference to which is in Natural Science, 6; p.67). Apparently he went to work with the collection of the Gaekwar of Baroda. As Baroda Museum is not in this catalogue, the challenge is there to find out more about it. Baroda has (or had) collections of "local and Indian rocks, minerals, fossils and casts of fossils" according to Howarth and Platnauer's Directory of Museums (1911). On the subject of Indian Museums, Cleavelly has information on two institutions there, The Indian Museum and the Geological Survey of India. Kenneth Hudson and Ann Nicholl's Directory of Museums (1975) lists 25 in that country as claiming to possess at least some geological material. (Even this modern listing of museums of the world is quite incomplete and badly cross-indexed as a cursory glance at the section on British Museums shows). We clearly have a long way to go. I use the "we" deliberately. It is up to the curatorial profession collectively to ensure that these ventures eventually become complete, and are then updated. Surely nobody can expect one man to do all this work unaided.

The layout of the book is straightforward. The introduction is followed by three sections. They all make interesting and relevant reading on the "History of Earlier Guides to Geological Collections", "History of Fossil Collecting" and "Reasons for compiling this index". The basic research interest of Ron Cleavelly is in the mollusca. This is reflected in many of the examples used. One of the problems lies in the bibliography. There are eighteen pages of references but these are divided into the appropriate subject areas. However, these do not always correspond with the text and so one searches through several lists before arriving at the correct source. Indeed, one of the references, at least, is not in the bibliography. This refers to the supposedly apocryphal story (under the section on Fossil Collecting and Collections) recounted by Sowerby of Buckland's experiences while collecting a large ammonite. This is reproduced here because of the amusing nature of the account. The full reference is Sowerby, J. (1816) The Mineral Conchology of Great Britain etc., Volume 2 (part 23), p.69 (not 1818 as given in the text).

A reviewer, naturally, is always delighted to pounce on errors or omissions. Being very conscious of such occurrences in my own work with the North West Collection Research Unit this would be a case of stones versus glass houses. However, in the opinion that these should be brought to the attention of the compiler in order to facilitate an update, in the event of a second edition, a few noticed are as follows:

Abbot, W. J. L.

The gemmological material in the Wellcome Museum has been transferred to Merseyside County Museum.

Bullock, William.

I believe that some of Bullock's minerals are in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow.

Wood, G. W.

The collection (which appears to have been lost) was at Stand Grammar School, Manchester, not Manchester Grammar School. Let's hope it turns up somewhere!

AMMONITES Bucklandi.

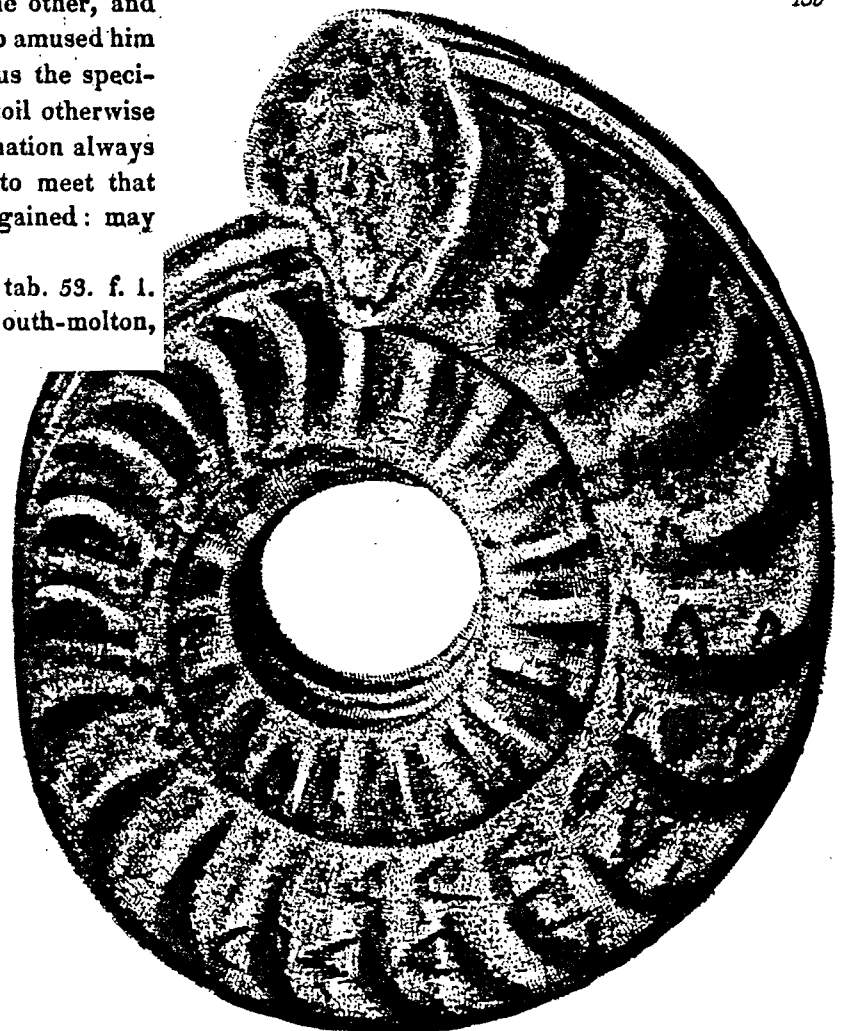
TAB. CXXX.

SPEC. CHAR. Depressed, inner volutions exposed, with large obtuse radii; back carinated, and a furrow on each side of the keel; aperture quadrate.

VOLUTIONS about five, their sides wholly exposed, the back flattish, with two concentric grooves, and an intermediate keel; the radii are swelled towards the back, over which they are suddenly reflected, and gradually lost, as in several other carinated Ammonites; the keel is obtuse and entire.

Found in the Blue Lias of Bath and the neighbourhood, measuring from a foot to 21 inches or more in diameter, and rather remarkable for having frequently lost the inner whorls; which circumstance, by a sort of friendly pun, has given rise to the name given it, in honour of a meritorious and enlightened Geologist, the Rev. W. Buckland, who having found a large specimen, was induced by his ardour to carry it himself, although of considerable weight, and being on horseback it was not the less inconvenient; but the inner whorls being gone so as to allow his head and shoulder to pass through, he placed it as a French horn is sometimes carried, above one shoulder and under the other, and thus rode with his friendly companions, who amused him by dubbing him an *Ammon Knight*; and thus the specimen was secured, by diverting the tedious toil otherwise hardly to be borne. May his zeal for information always be rewarded: may his abilities continue to meet that attention they have hitherto so deservedly gained: may his horn be exalted with honour.

Mr. B. lately found *Ammonites striatus*, tab. 53. f. 1. in the transition slate of Filliagh, near South-molton, Devonshire.



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Brocklehurst, Marianne
Jurassic brachiopods, Cheshire County Museum Service

Greg, Robert Phillips
Meteorites from 223 falls purchased from him by
Dr. Oldham in 1865 (Geological Museum, Calcutta)

Blackstock, William
Bright, J. A.
Brown, (Prof.) Campbell
Caine, Caesar
Stanley, Edward Smith (13th Earl of Derby)
French (Mrs.) I.M.M.
Echwige & Reed
Kerr, (Dr.) James
Legh, Thomas
Robinson, Bethel

Mineral entries not
included (from
N.W.C.R.U. data)

Having not actually read every entry in the index, there will be other additions which I will communicate to Ron Cleevly directly. The "Reasons for compiling" are obvious and should touch a chord in every curator. Perhaps the best justification is contained in a quote from J. W. Mighels after he suffered fire damage to his collection. The "money and books... and goods... and buildings... can be replaced but collections, I fear, never!" (Unfortunately, the details of this event are not known to me and I cannot find a reference to it in the bibliography).

In the field of palaeontology, there are certain parameters which do not apply to living organisms. Whereas modern-day species can be extinguished permanently, fossil remains can be temporarily lost for environmental reasons. The effect is basically the same. The result is that to consult the characters of a species, recourse must be made to the preserved material in museums. One of the prime driving forces in producing this index is therefore to provide the researcher with the means of gaining access to the specimen. As a schoolboy I spent a large proportion of my spare time fossil hunting in the vicinity of Ulverston (Cumbria). The exposures to the north were of Silurian rocks, especially a quarry exposed c.1796 in order to build the canal nearby. I had always assumed that these particular facies were non-fossiliferous. It was only later that I realised that John Bolton (1791-1873) had collected what he could find there and geologists from the Survey had got the rest. Only dynamite or the passage of millenia will allow the collecting of more examples. The researcher obviously has to locate extant material from each area in which he is interested. This is where the World Palaeontological Collections comes into its own. I now know that some of John Bolton's material is in South Kensington; that the I.G.S. is the place to go. In fact, a specimen of the fossil bivalve Cardiola interrupta is exhibited in the Geological Museum's display on "British Geology" from the very quarry that I climbed over as a youngster.

Another interesting entry relates to John Ruskin's collections. Basically, as a man of artistic and literary bent, his collections are not scientifically of great interest. He said of himself that he "knew more of scenery than most geologists and more about geology than most artists". However, despite this ambiguous position he amassed a lot of geological material. The situation at Coniston is that parts of Ruskin's collections are still preserved at both the museum in Coniston (The Ruskin Museum) and at Brantwood (Ruskin's home) a point over which much confusion has arisen in the past. Also, if some of his material is not now in Kirkcudbright, where is it now? Another trail to follow for the enthusiastic collection researcher.

Quite obviously, this is a book without which the library of any geology or general natural history department in a museum would be incomplete. Ron Cleevely has done a magnificent job in compiling the entries from disparate sources. His perseverance in this task has at last come to fruition much to the gratification of the many people who have encouraged him, as well as to himself. Buy it! What is more important, buy it and then send in all the additional data which you have not been communicating. The goal of cataloguing the whereabouts of all natural history collections is, I believe, achievable. This book meets one of the aspects more than half of the way.

E. G. Hancock.

World Directory of Palaeontological Collections.
Notice to Institutions in the British Isles and
Scandinavia.

As a means of providing a world-wide specimen data base for palaeontological research, the International Palaeontological Association is compiling a World Directory of Palaeontological Collections. In general, the aim is to collate information on those institutions that hold significant collections of fossils, particularly type material. Regional coordinators are responsible for distributing questionnaires within various parts of the world. For the British Isles and Scandinavia the coordinator is Dr M.G. Bassett (Dept. of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF1 3NP) who is currently distributing questionnaires to all known institutions in the region. It is possible that a few institutions holding significant collections have been overlooked; if any such organisation has not received a questionnaire by the end of April 1983, they are invited to contact Dr Bassett for information.

For other parts of the world, information can be obtained directly from the Convenor of the Committee, Dr B.D. Webby, Dept. of Geology and Geophysics, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.

STOP PRESS !! The Palaeontological Association Circular No. 112 (April, 1983) has just arrived with the notice above. This apparent duplication may be avoided by a network of coordinators as already proposed in this review in order to cover the countries which are at present under-recorded. The different perspective of a convenor based in Australia may also help to counteract our western approach. The only problem lies in the confusing similarity in title which may be counterproductive when it comes to marketing the product.