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The afternoon session of the AGM took the form of an informal talk on the general problems of preservation given by Reg Harris with ample opportunity for audience participation and discussion.

In a very stimulating talk Reg reminded us of the fundamentals of preservation and gave a review of methods together with the problems they produce. He emphasized that fixed material dissociates over the years and many of our major collections are undergoing changes. When some of the sludge found at the bottom of museum jars was investigated it was found to contain perfect cells.

Fixation must be followed by preservation. As both alcohol and formalin dilute with age we were advised to replace preservatives in museum jars completely not to just top them up!

New methods of fixation were discussed. Although comparatively little work has been done on it, Dowicil, a byproduct of naphthalene, which acts as a formalin releaser is proving very useful particularly for whole animal fixation.

Keeping agents were also discussed. We were advised not to use Nascoguard (ethyl glycol) as it is dangerous.

Clinosol (8-hydroxyquinolin sulphate) in powder form, from Hamburg was useful. Biochemical analysis can be carried out on specimens up to three weeks after they had been put into Clinosol.

Seraquin in liquid form, the English equivalent of Clinosol is very acid. As it corrodes metal preparation should be carried out in enamel dishes. It was interesting to hear that embedding specimens in plastic blocks is not now recommended. Time has shown that the blocks can blow up and craze due to oxidation, UV radiation from strip lights and acid from handling.

The attachment of specimens to backing plates, prevention of pest attack in freeze dried specimens and the reclaiming of dried up specimens were discussed.

It was an interesting afternoon which left the participants with much to think about, not least that a group should be set up to deal with preservation and conservation problems in the Biological Sciences linking up with more general biodeterioration.

If anyone is interested in forming such a group please contact me :- Mrs Rosina Down, Department of Zoology, University College, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT.