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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Another factor to bear in mind is whether, or not, members of the public would be as likely to bring in victims of weather, traffic, windows or pets, given that there would be no apparent tangible public benefit in doing so. The result would be not only the loss of much scientific data (locality records, measurements etc.) but also a reduced likelihood of discovering illegally killed animals and acting accordingly.

The argument of the signatories to the agreement seems to be based on two premises: firstly, that some people on seeing stuffed specimens will want to go out and acquire their own. As far as I know, there is no evidence to support this and I would contend that would-be collectors would find their way into such activities without any prompting from museum displays or examples at lectures.

Secondly, that schools (and Museums?) are likely to indulge in trading in specimens. If the continued adherence to this agreement is really because of a threat from "...collecting and trading in eggs and stuffed birds for use in schools", then the signatories not only ignore the weight of legislation to prevent such activities, but appear to have a very low opinion of the integrity of both schools staff, and, by implication, natural history curators. I suggest it is time for some active lobbying.

Yours sincerely,
Alec Coles
Assistant Curator
Woodspring Museum, Weston-super-Mare

P.S. I can honestly say that in the last five years I have come across no-one either in the Museum, at lectures or anywhere else who has believed we kill for our displays (and I have done hand counts at WI's etc.). Despite this Steve's point is well taken and notice to this effect in our Natural History Gallery might be a good idea. I know that Bristol Museum produces a handbill explaining what should be done if animals are found dead, and how they use specimens brought in.

Committee News

AGM

The AGM was well attended this year and there were several changes in committee membership. This is the new line-up.

Chairman: Tony Irwin, Norfolk Museums Service
Secretary: post vacant
Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Advertising Officer: Adam Wright, Coventry Museum
Editor: John Mathias, Leicestershire Museums Service
Special Publications Editor: Steve Garland, Bolton Museums

Committee:
Geoff Stansfield (1984) University of Leicester
Geoff Hancock (1985) Glasgow Museum
Graham Walley (1985) Nottingham, Wollaton Hall Museum
Phil Collins (1986) St. Albans Museum
Gordon Reid (1986) Horniman Museum, London
Steve Moran (1986) Inverness Museum
Howard Mendel (1986) Ipswich Museum
Derek Whiteley (1986) Sheffield Museum
Di Smith, GCG representative (co-opted)

Committee business has been rather fragmented this year with Penny Wheatcroft stepping down as Secretary after the AGM and no-one else volunteering for the job; despite the election of five new committee members we still have one vacancy.

PUBLICATIONS

There is no news of the publication of the CARDIFF CONFERENCE REPORT (was it really four years ago?) or the BERNICE WILLIAMS REPORT. I understand that Peter Morgan spoke on the Williams Report to the MA Conference in Aberdeen, so the Conference Proceedings should bring us up to date. Still in Aberdeen, Peter Davis gave a rousing talk on the achievements of BCG over the past ten years and highlighted some of the problems we face during the next ten. I hope to publish the text in the next Newsletter.

COLLECTIONS

The dispersal of some of the natural history collections from the Grosvenor Museum in Chester has gone ahead as planned and the position there is now stable. Fiona MacKenzie will summarise the movements in the next Newsletter. Some concern was expressed at the last Committee meeting about the current

status of Calke Abbey collections following their purchase by the National Trust (who seem to employ no biological curators or conservators despite owning large natural history collections); enquiries are being made.

There has been some concern in recent months over the fate of the natural history collections at Swansea Museum now that the University has finally decided to withdraw its financial support. Dr. Isaac, the curator, is to move to the Adult Education Department of the University when the building closes to the public. Other sources of funding have been approached (like the County and District Authorities) but nothing has yet been promised. The National Museum of Wales is exploring the possibilities of taking over the museum and maintaining it as a branch museum, but this is not yet decided. In the meantime, the collections will be transferred to safe (but probably inaccessible) storage at the University or the NMW.

BM(NH)

The BM(NH) policy on charging continues to intrigue the Committee and there were two distinct views expressed at the last meeting. We agree that charging for services like serious enquiries from other institutions (or individuals), and charging for lab space, use of rooms and access to collections (which presumably includes access to type specimens) should be deemed unacceptable by the scientific community at large and therefore opposed. However we disagree about charging for entrance to the displays; Penny Wheatcroft, wearing her Union hat, is fighting that policy tooth and nail (and she certainly has my support) whereas other Committee members work in museums which levy entrance charges and feel it is beyond the remit of BCG to take a stance on this issue. So, it is not BCG policy to oppose entrance charges at the BM(NH) although the Committee did agree to circulate literature from the 'anti' lobby with this Newsletter.

MANUAL

The first meeting of the editorial group for the MANUAL FOR BIOLOGICAL CURATORS has taken place. Now that the project is finally under way I hope to report progress regularly in the Newsletter. Initial discussion covered format, structure, content and funding, but apart from the decision to adopt loose-leaf format, nothing concrete was decided. The next meeting on content should be more productive.

CURATORIAL COURSE - do you want one?

About two years ago, BCG and GCG sponsored a Natural Sciences Curatorial Course at Leicester University Department of Museum Studies. It was aimed at the in-post curator and at students taking the MA Diploma (although it had no official standing with the Museums Association). There was a strong bias

in favour of specialist practical curatorial matters, a subject area many people feel is neglected in official Diploma training. It may be possible to run a similar course next year (1987) if there is sufficient interest. If you think you might be able to attend a week-long course, probably based at a museum rather than Leicester University, in the summer of 1987 please let the committee know, either through me (John Mathias) or any committee member. We would like to discuss this at the next meeting on November 12th, so please send in replies by then.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Treasurer reports we are about £600 down on subs this year. If you have not paid your sub for 1986, please do so now.

Diary

Friday 5th December 1986

GCG meeting on the theme 'Geology and the Media', also AGM. Manchester Museum. BCG members welcome. Contact: Richard Porter, Manchester Education Service.

Friday 10th and Saturday 11th April 1987

BCG meeting centred around the new Natural History Gallery at Sheffield Museum; full programme to be announced. AGM at Sheffield Museum on 10th. Contact: Derek Whiteley at Sheffield Museum.

September/October 1987 (date to be fixed)

BCG meeting on the use of live animals in museum displays; full programme to be announced. To be organised by Adam Wright and Gordon Reid and held at Coventry Museum.

STOP PRESS

Derek Whiteley (Sheffield Museum) has agreed to become acting Secretary of the Group. The Committee would like to thank Penny Wheatcroft for all the work she has put into the Secretaryship over recent years, particularly after moving to the BM(NH) when her involvement with BCG was not encouraged by the Museum authorities. We are all grateful for, and have benefitted from, her energy and commitment.