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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Fate of the Natural History Collections  
at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester

Members may remember some years ago that concern was expressed about the future of the Natural History collections at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester. This followed the decision not to refill the then vacant post of Keeper of Natural History.

After discussion with the Museums Association, the Biology Curators' Group and the Geological Curators' Group, Chester City Council decided to transfer on long term loan, certain discrete collections to other museums, where their future use in research and their safety could be assured.

In the main these collections were either:

1 those that had special scientific or historical significance either regionally or nationally; or

2 those that had little or no relevance to the Grosvenor Museum or its locality under present-day collecting policy.

It was decided to appoint a part time Natural History Assistant to oversee these transfers, to curate the remaining collections and to develop their educational use at all levels.

Prior to the appointment a large collection of mounted bird specimens from the county of Essex was returned to Chelmsford Museum at their request. The birds had originally been passed to the Grosvenor Museum in 1957. Title to the Chelmsford Bird Collection has reverted to Chelmsford Borough Council. This case is distinct from subsequent transfers where the title remains with Chester City Council, and a long term loan period of 15 years has been agreed.

I took up the post of part time Natural History Assistant on 2nd September 1985 and began work on transferring certain collections where specific requests had already been received and accepted.

Following discussions with and advice from a number of other museum services, final decisions about other transfers were delayed until I had sufficient time to review the collections and research their historical and geographical associations with Chester and district, and to assess their suitability and potential for educational use within the Museum.

At the present time the majority of transfers have been completed. In some cases the receiving institutions have delayed their transfers until sufficient space to house them has been found. Final transfer of records and official transfer of documents has been delayed but should be completed soon.

For further information contact Fiona J. Mackenzie, Natural History Assistant, Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

Set out below is a simple listing of the collections which have been transferred.

#### GEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

Carboniferous plants: 40 specimens from Teilia Quarry, Gwaenysgar, Clwyd (includes type and cited specimens). Transferred to National Museum of Wales, Department of Geology on permanent loan.

Triassic vertebrate fossil footprints: the Osmund W. Jeffs collection of Triassic amphibian and reptile footprints from Storeton Quarries, Merseyside. To be transferred on 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Geology.

Quaternary molluscs: the A.C. Nicholson collection from Gloppa Gravels, near Oswestry, Salop. To be transferred on 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Geology.

#### BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS

Grosvenor Museum herbarium I flowering plants and ferns: primarily the collections of Eliza Potts with associated collectors.

Eliza Potts: mainly local specimens or northern bias, collected 1832-1866.  
M.E. Feilden: Cheshire and North Wales 1880's  
A.J. Thornton: Surrey 1919  
T. Edmondson: local Cheshire material collected 1960's

Grosvenor Museum herbarium II flowering plants and ferns: collection of A. Pollitt, local (Cheshire), collected 1920's, and two volumes of alpine flowers collected by Leigh Mallory.

Algae: 3 volumes, 1 folder. Seaweeds collected by Miss E.E. Feilden from Isle of Wight and the Welsh coast 1840-1870.

Fungi: 3 boxes of microscope slides and plant hosts in envelopes with a manuscript list and notes collected and prepared by Dr. Theodore Green.

Seed collection: all on 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Botany.

Algae: Stolterforth diatom slide collection and manuscripts, with slides including specimens from HMS Challenger. 15 year loan to British Museum (Natural History), Department of Botany.

#### ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

##### Invertebrates

Insects: British, 4 boxes of Albert R. Wright Hymenoptera specimens. 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Invertebrate Zoology.

N.B. Other specimens will follow when full cataloguing has allowed us to assess the collections more fully. These will include:

British Macro Lepidoptera: data specimens from amalgamated reference series; most data specimens from A.H. Thompson; in store boxes.

British beetles: exceptionally interesting specimens only.

British Micro Lepidoptera: all data specimens.

British 'other insects': all data specimens.

Foreign hawk moths: small number of data specimens.

Insecta: Foreign, 40 drawers of assorted non-data foreign insects in a cabinet loaned to the Horniman Museum, Department of Natural History. Specimens to be used for display, educational work etc. and a small collection to be returned in presentable condition for use by our Educational Services.

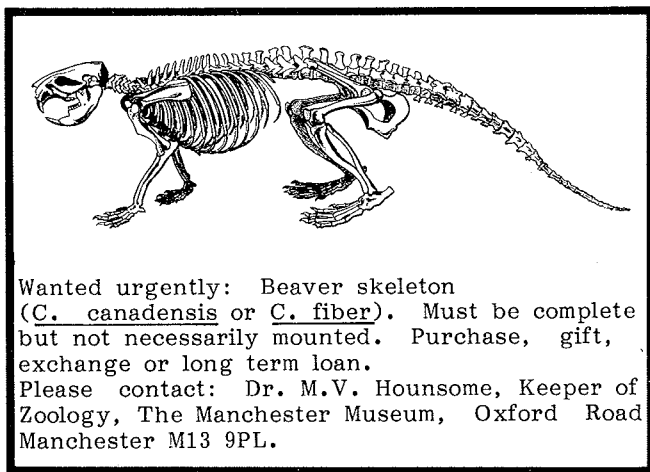
Mollusca: all data specimens (approximately 200), listed by Mrs N. MacMillan. 15 year loan to National Museums on Merseyside, Department of Invertebrate Zoology.

#### Vertebrates

Bird egg collections: all contained in five cabinets and several boxes. Main collectors: Webster, P.W., Elppick, G.B., Strefford, R., Broome, L., Dobie, W.H., Coward, T., Worthington. 15 year loan to Manchester Museum, Department of Zoology.

Mammal bones (cave material): 37 boxes from Cefn Caves, Prestatyn, North Wales. 15 year loan to National Museum of Wales, Department of Zoology.

F.J. Mackenzie  
Natural History Assistant  
Grosvenor Museum, Chester  
October 1986



Wanted urgently: Beaver skeleton (*C. canadensis* or *C. fiber*). Must be complete but not necessarily mounted. Purchase, gift, exchange or long term loan. Please contact: Dr. M.V. Hounsome, Keeper of Zoology, The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road Manchester M13 9PL.

## Letters

Further to the debate on the use of stuffed birds in displays, the following letter, sent by Richard Porter of the RSPB to Geoff Halfpenny at Stoke Museum, states the RSPB's position very clearly. The letter is reproduced with Mr. Porter's permission.

Dear Mr. Halfpenny,

As far as the RSPB's attitude towards the use of stuffed birds in exhibitions is concerned, I feel it would be helpful if I explained our current policy.

The RSPB has always given support to the ICBP recommendation that stuffed and mounted birds should not be used in any exhibition. This was unanimously adopted in 1968 at the ninth conference of the European Continental Section which stated:

"Recognising that the increased collecting of, and trading of, eggs and stuffed specimens for use in schools have now reached such proportions that they now constitute a menace to many species... recommends to Ministers of Education of European Countries that such teaching material should be discontinued and replaced by photographs, colour slides, films, tape recordings and other audio-visual aids presenting the birds in their natural setting, which corresponds more appropriately to modern educational methods".

In addition RSPB staff and anyone acting in the name of the Society, may not exhibit or show mounted (stuffed), specimens or eggs in any talk, exhibition or display. Furthermore, the use of preserved birds, study skins and parts of birds (eg. wings, feet, skeletons, feathers) and old nests may be permitted for use in talks and displays with discretion. Full consideration, however, should always be given to the use of alternatives, such as paper or polystyrene models. In any such exhibit, the specimens or parts must have been legally acquired and a note displayed stating their origin.

You will note that this policy applies to RSPB staff and those acting in the name of the RSPB. It does not, of course, apply to other organisations.

Clearly, the use of stuffed birds in exhibitions is a matter for individuals and others to decide upon for themselves. If anyone contacts us, we will inform them of our policy, but it would be presumptuous of us to insist, or even persuade them, to follow it. In addition we ensure they are informed of the laws governing the keeping and trading in stuffed birds; also that displays of stuffed birds can spark off an interest in the viewer which in turn might lead to an increase in demand for such specimens. This of course is impossible to quantify but a demand there