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Natural Sciences Collections Association

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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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visitor appeal, and, one has to say it, those museum directors who fail to appreciate the potential of natural science collections and exhibitions.

If we had really won the battle for hearts and minds, why is it, that within two years of the publication of Biological Collections UK, so many biology curation posts are threatened, and even lost? Why have we seen the Natural History Museum emasculated? Why is the Hancock Museum under threat of closure? It is for this reason that our increased profile in the Museums Journal is so important, because although the public will not read it, the people who sit in judgement on our futures, might just. If they read the August Museums Journal, they will find out from Bill Pettit the incredible range of potential uses of their collections. Chris Yeates and Ian Evans describe the importance of environmental recording work, whilst I urge museums to exploit the 'green decade' for their own benefit, as well as that of the environment. In addition there are a number of case histories of display and exhibition initiatives; most importantly in this context, Paul Howard tells how to get 200,000 paying visitors into your museum!

## **The Museums Association Conference, 1991**

There is no harm in reinforcing a good point! To this end, and knowing the contents of the August Journal, I was able to present a motion to the Public Affairs session of the MA Annual Conference, on behalf of BCG and GCG. The eventual wording of the motion was agreed by a small group of members attending conference, and read as follows:

'Given the current and continuing significance of environmental issues, the role of natural science collections in museums as the material evidence of the diversity of the natural world, and as support tools for environmental research and education, conference insists that the current and potential use of natural sciences collections be properly recognised by government, local authorities, museum governing bodies and museum staff, and that their proper care and development must be assured by the provision of adequate resources.'

I am pleased to say that the motion was passed unanimously, and whilst such a motion carries no formal guarantee of action, its importance should not be underestimated. It does at least affirm the support of the whole museums profession for the natural sciences.

The need to educate the wider public about our functions is understood; the need to educate councillors and trustees is recognised through initiatives such as the Sunflower Campaign; we should be mindful of the need to convince other museum professionals lest through their ignorance, and our ineffectiveness, they become the enemy within .....

Alec Coles  
Principal Keeper of Natural Sciences  
Tyne and Wear Museums

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# **FENSCORE**

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## **Collections research - the latest**

The activities of BCG and of the Federation for Natural Sciences Collections Research (FENSCORE) over the last few years have borne fruit in an increasing awareness among policy-makers of the importance of the national resource represented by natural science collections in the UK. Such awareness has been reflected in the recent Museums and Galleries Commission 'natural science incentive funding' made available via Area Museum Councils, and also in grants to FENSCORE for database development.

The national database of collections, compiled from information supplied by the various regional Collection Research Units (CRUS), had been maintained at Manchester Museum since 1980. However, latterly lack of staff time at Manchester severely restricted both the updating and the publicity needed to make potential users aware of this valuable information resource. Therefore, in November 1988, the FENSCORE committee set up a working party 'to examine the feasibility of the Museum Documentation Association (MDA) maintaining, and providing a service from, the FENSCORE national database'. That working party met in February 1989 and agreed that the proposal was feasible, and the FENSCORE committee, at its meeting in June 1989, accepted a detailed set of proposals from the working party. A successful application to the MGC resulted in a grant of £8000 in April 1990, to fund the checking and concordance of the data from three CRUs: the North West,

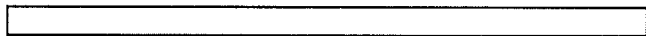
Yorkshire and Humberside, and Scotland. The work being done includes adding a new field to allow entries to be coded according to the period the collection was assembled. Each decade covered is coded, so that now one can select collections containing 'pre-1850 material', or those with specimens from 1909-1919.

In April 1991 a further MGC grant of £5000 has enabled the South West, South East, and, in part, the North of England data to be processed during the current year. The South East data gathering, including input from the BM(NH) and Kew, is almost complete; the South West CRU expect to complete data gathering by January 1992. A grant of £3000 is being requested to complete the North of England data, and to process the Midlands information; the Midlands *Register of Collections* should be available from November 1991.

As the concordance of the data for each region is completed, it is being copied back to the relevant CRU, who then become responsible for any further updating and editing. Periodically each upgraded regional database will be copied back again to the MDA, where it will replace the previous version in the national database. A security copy of the latest version of the national database will still be held at Manchester Museum.

Curators should make use of this information resource, and encourage other workers to do so as well. Search enquiries should be addressed to Kate Jeary. MDA, 347 Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge CB1 4DH,

Charles Pettitt  
Manchester Museum



## Simon Moore moves to Hampshire

After 23 years of curating at the Natural History Museum Simon Moore has moved to a brand new laboratory at the Hampshire County Museums Service, Winchester, as Conservator of Natural Sciences. He will be available, once again, to answer questions about freeze-drying and fluid preservation of natural history specimens.



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# Committee News

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At the AGM in Liverpool on 5th April 1991 the following Committee was elected (year of election in brackets)

**Chairman** Steve Garland (1987), Bolton Museum, Greater Manchester

**Secretary (Acting)**

Mike Graham (1991), Towneley Hall Museum, Burnley, Lancs.

**Treasurer/Membership Secretary**

Kathie Way (1989), Natural History Museum, London

**Newsletter Editor**

John Mathias (1986), Leicestershire Museums Service, Leicester

**Journal and Special Publications Editor**

Bill Pettitt (1991), Manchester Museum, Greater Manchester

**Education Officer**

Alec Coles (1990), Sunderland Museum, Tyne and Wear

**Committee**

Steve Judd (1990), Liverpool Museum, Merseyside

Ray Barnett (1990), Bristol Museum, Avon

Richard Sutcliffe (1989), Glasgow Museum, Strathclyde

Steve Hewitt (1990), Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, Cumbria

Mark Simmons (1991), North of England Museums Service, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Rosina Down (1991), UCL, London

Steve Maron (1991), Inverness Museum

**Co-opted**

Di Hawkes (GCG Rep)

Geoff Stansfield (Manual of Curatorship)

Subscriptions were raised from 1 January 1992 to £8.00 for individual membership and £15 for institutional membership. (Remember that as a museum professional you should be able to reclaim income tax on your subs.) There has been a 10% increase in membership, due totally to the hard work of Kathie Way.

A number of subjects have occupied the Committee this year.

Some museums have had worrying experiences because of the retrospective granting of wildlife import licences. Confiscated items have been