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undoubtedly be a period for experimentation and change, to which I hope BCG and its membership will contribute.

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Hounded to extinction and beyond?

A few years ago I wrote a short note in the Newsletter pointing out that the market in rhino horn had placed a value on museum specimens that might warrant more stringent security. The Guardian (16.9.1992) recently reported that thieves had broken into Oslo Museum smashed an elephant skull and taken the tusks. While this may be a freak occurrence it is worth noting that Oslo is no nearer the centre of the ivory trade than Cleethorpes. With the dehorning of rhinos in the wild, a continuing decline in their numbers, military protection for many of those that survive and an implied death sentence for poachers, museum collections which are protected by relatively weak laws may increasingly be seen as a soft option for those desperate to acquire this material.

Simon Knell

People and Places

Scunthorpe shrinks!

Scunthorpe Museums Service is the latest in a long list of British museums to be affected by cuts in local government funding. After five years of expansion the Museums Service looks set to shrink back to its former self. Cash shortages have meant that some redundancies were likely but in response the museum staff have left like lemmings – Keeper of Natural Science post is temporarily frozen, Curator (deleted (in effect)), Exhibition Officer (frozen), Conservation Technician (deleted), Museum Assistant (deleted)... the list goes on. Of these posts it is expected that the natural science post will be filled in the new financial year provided the British economy doesn't plummet any further – and who can predict that! The Natural Science Department

remains for the time being the responsibility of Kevin Leahy, the Principal Keeper, with temporary trainee Museum Assistant (Natural Science) Sue Rainton keeping things ticking over. (Now the good news, this important post was advertised in December – Ed)

Peter Davis has been appointed Lecturer in Museum Studies attached to the Department of Archeology at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. A Masters Degree in Museum Studies will be launched next year and there will be a marked increase in the museological content of current undergraduate teaching. If anyone has promotional materials etc that may be of interest to Peter he will make good use of them.

Congratulations to John Mathias who is (as of 21.9.92) Assistant Director of Leicester Museums.

Please note that Jane Mee's correct address is Ludlow Museum, Old Street, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1NW, tel 0584 873857 and not as published in the last newsletter.

Ann Nicol, late graduate trainee in biology at Leicester Museums has been appointed to a one year post at the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow working principally on the wet collections and osteological material. Her post was jointly funded by the Scottish Museums Council, the Pilgrim Trust and the D'Oyly Carte Trust.

News from Sheffield – from Derek Whiteley

A combination of poll-capping and financial legacies of the World Student Games has created a desperate financial situation here.

My old post, Assistant Keeper (Zoology) which had existed since the early 1960's has been deleted. Some duties will be taken over by Paul Richards and myself. We are promoting self-service access to collections and operating a basic enquiry service. Many other functions will disappear with the post.

The City Museum and the Natural History Section both have severe income targets. We are resisting the imposition of admission charges, bench charges for access to collections, and meeting targets by lectures, commercial enquiries, consultancy work and mini-blockbusters such as the 'Big Butterfly Show' and the 'Big Rock and

Fossil Show'! "Stack 'em high and sell 'em (the exhibitions) cheap" is the current motto; like it or not.

On the brighter side Jean Glasscock has joined us from English Nature to take the new post of Assistant Ecologist (Contracts) to action the growing consultancy wing. In August Lucy Heath became Sheffield Wildlife Action Officer, another new post funded by a three-way partnership with the Yorks Wildlife trust and the Countryside Commission. In November Jeremy Brown re-joins us to continue the RECAP Lepidoptera project, grant-aided by MGC 'Sunflower' money. In September, fresh from her NVQ Natalie Barlow also rejoined us as part-time assistant.

At the City Museum, Paul Richards and I have been seconded into a team organising a large exhibition of rock and pop music to make ends meet. Routine natural history will suffer but at least we get to play with neons and juke boxes. There is no doubt that things are going to get worse. Sheffield City Council faces massive financial problems in 1993/4, redundancies are looming and we are tied to the same committee responsible for World Student Games debts. We currently have a total expenditure and staff freeze in action.

Still, life goes on and I am hoping to woo local commerce and industry with a Sheffield Biodiversity Research Programme to channel new resources into our work. Our logo? – the ruby-tailed wasp *Chrysis ignita* of course!

The new Staff structure in Glasgow Museums — from Geoff Hancock

Within the last year a new staff structure has been introduced which has affected everyone in Glasgow's city museum service to a greater or lesser extent. Until recently there were eight departments, each of which had a Keeper and comprised a number of curatorial staff and technical support staff and conservators. As far as Natural History was concerned these last two categories were collectively referred to as 'Taxidermy'. This title, though convenient, was often misunderstood even by colleagues in other departments. Their work was more than the traditional skills of taxidermy or casting and modelling, as most forms of preparation and

conservation of older material was also undertaken, including geological work.

Inclusive of the other sections such as design and works (but excluding administration and the directorate) the whole of the staff are now grouped in one of three units. These are curatorial, conservation and creative services. The first of these is itself divided into three – art, history and science each with a newly graded post of senior curator. Conservation includes specialists and practitioners in various materials of which one is rather loosely labelled organic. This will provide for the well-being of a variety of museum objects but will obviously have biological collections as a major 'client'. Creative services will include those involved with all forms of presentation and taxidermy is one such skill. However, the usual problem experienced in those museums which have also tried to categorise processes into functions are anticipated. Who will apply the taxidermy process to the needs of curation or conservation? Perhaps a more pertinent question would be how will the individuals' work be organised given that the application of these skills is beyond their immediate line managers remit?

According to any one project, be it the relocation of a store or a temporary exhibition, a team, drawing members from all appropriate sections, will be given the task of ensuring it is carried out professionally, to a timetable and within budget.

The science section will embrace such disparate objects as steam engines and fungi, wirelasses and wireworms. These examples are drawn from different ends of a very large spectrum of more than linear complexity. Curators who are botanists or transport historians still function as such. One of the problems at Glasgow is that the middle of this spectrum is essentially missing. New staff and policies will be needed if the museum is going to attempt to cover other scientific issues such as inventions, voyages of discovery or medical history. The material evidence for this is preserved in the Hunterian collections in the university and in the national collections in Edinburgh. Cooperation rather than competition will be required here.

The new senior curator is Dr Darryl Mead, an industrial historian from the Powerhouse in Sydney. Six posts for science curators grades (i)-(iii) are presently allocated of which five are occupied by existing staff, the former keepers and assistants. The vacant post will be filled once all the dust has settled. The former deputy keeper of natural history, Fred Woodward, has taken early retirement leaving a large gap catering for the marine environment and the phylum Mollusca. As Scotland has a lot of the former and the museum has large collections of the latter this is a loss already being felt.

The Dodo and the Bonfire – A Myth Laid to Rest

The tale of the Oxford dodo is a celebrated museological story concerning, as it does, subjects dear to a curator's heart: ie. the perils of deaccessioning and interfering trustees. The traditional version of the story has it that in 1755, at the annual visit to the Ashmolean Museum of the trustees and Vice-Chancellor, the Museum's stuffed dodo was ordered to be burnt as, in its dilapidated state, it was considered not worth preserving. At some time later, when the specimen was put on the bonfire, a brave curator rushed in and pulled out the head and foot from the flames and the dodo was saved from complete destruction. This story seems to be beloved of lecturers; I heard it most recently twice at a conference in sunny Spain. Although I have often day-dreamed about my heroic predecessor and wondered what the equivalent action today might be, I felt that Oxford University was being unfairly condemned. Therefore it was good to see a more accurate picture published in a paper by the former Librarian of the Ashmolean Library, R.F. Ovenell, in *Archives of Natural History*.

Ovenell suggests that the true story, as far as it is now possible to discern, is not nearly so dramatic. The Vice-Chancellor and the trustees did indeed make their annual visit to the Museum and ordered that decaying specimens be removed from exhibition. The dodo fell into this category and the curators at the time carefully preserved what could be saved. It was not by heroics or a lucky accident that the head and foot survived to be listed in the 1756 catalogue of the zoological specimens. There

is no documentary evidence for a fire; the idea of the fire was introduced during the nineteenth century when the concept that the dodo was destroyed as an act of vandalism took hold.

It is hardly surprising that over the hundred years between the donation of the dodo to the University and the fateful visit in 1755 that the dodo had rotted – we still have considerable difficulty keeping specimens pest-free! Although the head and foot were preserved it was another hundred years before the Oxford dodo became truly immortal in the pages of Alice in Wonderland.

Ovenell, R.F. 1992 'The Tradescant Dodo', *Archives of Natural History* **19** (2): 145-152.

*Jane Pickering, Assistant Curator of Zoology,
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Return of the Warrah

Another extinct species, the Warrah or Falkland Island Fox *Duscicyon australis* was the subject of an idiosyncratic piece of writing by Rear Admiral Sir Christopher Layman no less in the MoD Conservation Magazine 'Sanctuary' (no.20, 1991) which has recently been brought to our notice. Having found that the only known mounted specimen of the species was in the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique "it was then an interesting exercise in bureaucratic manipulation" to get the specimen returned to the Falklands to "John Smith's marvellous museum in my old Falklands home, Britannia House, where (it) clearly ought to be". Really? Apparently the Falklands military mafia came in handy as it "turns up in surprising places and can usually get things done". I bet! Watch out for loan requests accompanied by stun grenades and large gents in red berets. I wonder if MGC registration applies in the Falklands and what environmental conditions are like in Mr Smith's museum? Bet the security's good though!

Proposed BSBI Study Group

Watch out for a note in BSBI News suggesting the formation of a Study Group for the History of the Discovery of the Vascular Flora of the British