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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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D. M. H. H.



NEWSLETTER

September 1993

Vol 6 No. 2

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - as given at the Inverness AGM.

The last two years have been difficult ones for the BCG and its membership. The museums' profession has suffered through budget cuts, re-organisation and the general effects of the recession.

At the same time the museums profession has seen rapid change in all its aspects. There are new techniques, new technology, new legal requirements and totally new approaches to museums' organisation and management. This has put greater demands onto individual curators and on to the BCG committee. It has resulted in less being achieved at a time when more is needed than ever before.

We have discussed the problems at BCG Committee and are proposing a number of changes. The fundamental change will be to broaden the committee and to involve more people in its work. Very few members have time to attend committees or to take on officer's posts. However, everyone has some time to devote to BCG, albeit only a small amount.

We are dividing up the work of committee into sensible units called cells. Each unit will be the responsibility of a cell of members. The cell will include one key person, a committee member, and a small number of other members, not on committee. The key person will represent the cell on committee and will be responsible for organising the cell's work. One cell might, for

example, cover the Newsletter. The editor would be the key cell member, whereas other members may take on specific elements of the Newsletter or may step in if the editor has problems to ensure that there is no disruption to production. This is just one example of how the new structure would work.

Details of proposed cells will be circulated to members for comment. Please give the committee some feedback. These changes will require alterations to the Constitution, and this will be proposed at the 1994 AGM on 11th and 12th April in Oxford. However, we will be setting up cells before then through necessity, to further BCG's work and we would welcome approaches from anyone who would like to help - even in a very small way.

Additionally we will be reducing committee meetings from 6 to 3 per year. This reduces the burden on committee members and may mean that BCG can help with travel expenses for some committee members.

This brings me on to the final change. We have discussed our finances at length at committee meetings and are concerned that the combined cost of the Newsletter and Journal is quite high - indeed it uses nearly 85% of our income. This restricts funds for other work severely. We are therefore reviewing the future form of the Newsletter and Journal and are seriously considering a new approach with just one magazine catering for all types of articles, produced three times a year.

I would welcome any questions on the proposals that I have mentioned but please give us some feedback when you receive our written proposals. The underlying philosophy of all of the changes is to concentrate on the practical aspects of curation. Finally, I would like to record my thanks to everyone who has been on committee during my six and a half years as Chairman. I have put a lot into BCG but got just as much out of it. I first became involved as Editor in 1981 and am looking forward to holding a non-officer post after 12 years. I think the only thing left to say is good luck to my successor and please make a special effort to support BCG over the next year.

Steve Garland

Please note that the Secretary's report, as given at the Inverness AGM, has not been included here but copies are available from the editor on receipt of a SAE.

Committee Changes

Thanks go to the retiring members of your committee who finished their three year term at Inverness - Steve Hewitt, Steve Judd and Ray Barnett, and of course to Steve Garland for the huge amount of effort he has put into BCG over the years. Your new Chairman is Mike Graham (Towneley Hall Museum, Burnley, BB11 3RQ) and Steve Thomson has donned the mantle of Secretary and can be reached at Scunthorpe Museum, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe DN15 7BD. We also welcome Jane Mee (Ludlow) and Jane Pickering (Oxford) to the committee. A full list of committee members will appear in the next issue.

Editor's note

Hands up those who spotted the deliberate mistake in the last issue? The issue should have been numbered Vol 6 Part 1 not as vol 10 part 1. This inexcusable lapse must have been brought on by a severe fever suffered by your editor during the proof reading of the issue. Please ensure that your cataloguing data are now correct.

On a personal note many thanks to all colleagues who contacted us following the inundation of January - your good wishes and offers of help were all greatly appreciated. It was interesting to hear of the session at the SPNHC conference on the practical methods used to deal with the flooded vertebrate collections at the University of

Texas. Perhaps someone who heard it could precis the main points for the Newsletter? My spirits were greatly augmented in more ways than one at the Inverness conference which was greatly enjoyed by all present. Many thanks to Steve Moran for this excellent meeting. Getting to close quarters with the dolphins of the Moray Firth on a pitching boat after the hospitality of the night before was a truly moving experience for at least one member!

Finally you may have noticed that MDA have issued a booklet and disk on *MODES for Natural Science Collections*. The topic of standards in natural science computerisation projects is something that has received little attention in the newsletter and I would like to include some information of general interest to computer users and MODES users in particular in a future issue. Please make contact with the editor if you have any points to raise or pass on.

Scottish Natural History - Report of conference

Held in Glasgow on 30 April - 1 May 1993, this meeting was a combination of the Easter conference of the Society of the History of Natural History and a celebration of William and John Hunter, born on a farm in nearby East Kilbride. Although an excuse was hardly necessary, this year is the bicentenary of death of John, the younger of the two brothers. It is possibly a source of initial confusion to some that there are two Hunterian collections, both founding museums. The one at the Royal College of Surgeons in London is that of John the comparative anatomist of great renown. The other is William's magnificently diverse bequest to Glasgow University forming the core of their museums and art gallery. The delegates heard of these two eighteenth century scientists, collectors and physicians/surgeons through accounts of both their contemporary significance and assessments by present day curators through the existing collections. The other half of the programme was devoted to accounts of a more general Scottish natural history flavour.

The support given to this event by the Friends of Glasgow University Library and the University itself meant that there was no conference fee. This ensured a good turn out of those locally interested in the diverse proceedings, swelling the