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## Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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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

numbers considerably. Amongst the curatorial delegates there were at least eight members of BCG of whom six were speaking to one or other of the themes. The highlight for me was the quietly polished but passionate account by a Professor of Anatomy at Glasgow, of William Hunter's work. As Hunter published little outside his work on the human gravid uterus, it was maintained that an analysis of his collections in combination with the archives would show him to have been a forerunner in many fields of medicine, but little recognised to date. No doubt others will have their favourite(s) and those who were not there will have to console themselves with the odd paper which may be published subsequently. It is not currently the policy of SHNH to attempt to print complete proceedings as matter of course.

*E. G. Hancock*

### **Conservation and the Herbarium - Conference Report**

A one-day conference organised by the Institute for Paper Conservation in collaboration with the National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM) and the National Museum of Wales (NMW) was held on 14 May, 1993 at Liverpool Museum and was attended by 40 delegates. Speakers included Dr Angus Gunn, Sally Ann Yates and Tracey Seddon (NMGM), Bob Child and Vicky Purewal (NMW), Dr Rob Huxley (Natural History Museum) and Kate Edmondson (Kew). The sessions were chaired by Dr John Edmondson (NMGM) and Steve Garland (Bolton Museum), and the meeting concluded with a tour of the herbarium, and a demonstration of the conservation project on the Roylean herbarium by Donna Hughes (NMGM).

Conservation is currently achieving a high profile in Liverpool, with the creation of a new Conservation Division of the NMGM.

Conservation staff who currently occupy sections of the various museum buildings will soon be housed together in a large city-centre listed building which is currently being converted and refurbished. The additional resources becoming available for conservation are now beginning to have an impact on many of the NMGM's collections, including those of the Botany Department which comprise more than 330,000 specimens.

The conference provided an opportunity to hear of some of the latest developments in materials and techniques used in the conservation of herbarium specimens and other botanical materials, and to learn of procedures adopted in various other large institutions. The publication in 1992 of the second edition of "The Herbarium Handbook" by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and the Museums & Galleries Commission's "Standards in the Museum care of Biological Collections", have helped to draw attention to the complex issues relating to the exceptionally demanding range of compositions and structures found in botanical collections.

The use of an ultrasonic humidifier for separating dried specimens which had been adhered to their backing sheets was one of the techniques described by Sally Ann Yates, who was standing in for her colleague Nicola Walker. Angus Gunn provided an overview of past and current practice in herbaria, while Bob Child covered the topics of environmental standards and pest control. Vicky Purewal described a recent conservation survey of the botany collections at the National Museum of Wales, while Rob Huxley spoke of the recent organisational changes at the Natural History Museum and the opportunities for closer monitoring of specimen handling by visitors and for loans. Kate Edmondson presented an illustrated account of the project to conserve botanical prints and drawings at Kew, where until very recently there had been no professional involvement by in-house paper conservators. Tracey Seddon's talk focused on the conservation of mixed-media botanical models, such as those made by R. Brendel of Berlin at the turn of the century. A new method of storage and transport was shown, and detailed techniques for the conservation of damaged models were described.

There was a lively discussion at the conclusion of the paper-reading session, where issues such as the conflict between safe storage and the scientific uses of plant collections were further aired. Five trade stands were also provided, allowing some of the latest materials and equipment to be demonstrated during the meal - and tea-breaks.

This was a very successful conference, not least because it brought together people from two rather different cultures - paper conservators and botanical curators - and provided a valuable