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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Author(s): Knell, S.

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operational details and other developments for Ann to tell you about in a future article!

I would just like to end with this plea. An initiative like SEARCH has a knock on effect in other spheres of operation, not least for conservation and collections management. For us it has meant a complete reappraisal of our acquisitions policy. We now have a particular need and use for foreign material which in the past we refused or redirected to other museums. So if anyone is responsible for good quality non-data foreign material and wishes to investigate the possibility of transferring it to a good home would they please contact Ann Nicol at SEARCH, 50 Clarence Road, Gosport, Hants. PO12 1BU (0705 501957).

Chris Palmer, Keeper of Biology and Curator of Havant Museum, Hampshire County Council Museum Service.

PARROTS at Oldham and elsewhere

Pieces of Eight, Pieces of Eight; Polly, Pretty Polly; Punch on Parrots; Monty Python and the deceased Norwegian Blue; Endangered Hyacinth - these were all phrases racing around my mind as I took up the post of Exhibitions Officer in Natural History at Oldham Museum. My predecessor, Jane Mee, had completed a feasibility study into the idea of a parrot touring exhibition before moving on to Ludlow, leaving me with copious information and an exhibition to organise!

Part of the agreement with the Museums and Galleries Commission to obtain financial assistance was that the tour should be well booked and this was one of my initial tasks. To my surprise the tour was almost fully booked within about six weeks of advertising - all this before we even began to put the exhibition together. This, in my opinion, highlights the demand and need for touring exhibitions - unfortunately the subsequent closure of the touring exhibitions unit means that small local museums like Oldham will find it virtually impossible to obtain funding to tour exhibitions in future.

Parrots was an exciting venture because of its multidisciplinary approach, incorporating art, literature and humour within a natural history framework. I was also very pleased to be organising a touring exhibition in natural history because we seem to see so few of them around.

Much of my time initially was taken up with looking into the loaning of material as Oldham had very little in its own collection relating to parrots. Our access to items for the exhibition was determined largely by money - we could not for example afford to pay

couriers to accompany items from one museum to another. However, most of the museums approached were exceedingly helpful and agreed to loan relevant material.

The exhibition eventually came to fruition; loans were completed; text written and the exhibition designed and built. It opened in Oldham on April 4th 1993 and is currently touring.

Sian Owen, Exhibitions Officer (Natural History) Oldham Museum

University of Leicester, Dept of Museum Studies Science and Natural Science Courses

For the first time, the Department of Museum Studies is inviting applicants wishing to take individual one week science and natural science modules. These modules form part of the University Diploma/M.Sc. in Museum Studies. Students wishing to go on to take the other modules which make up the course will be credited with the modules they have already taken. Other modules look more closely at the non-discipline based aspects of curation, for example, preventative conservation, documentation practice, collection management policies etc.

Sciences 1: Science Collections, 28 Feb - 4 March 1994

This course will take a wide look at science collections in museums, and is aimed particularly at students interested in the history and philosophy of science. The course will examine the nature of these collections, practice in collecting and conservation, directions for research and the basics of collections management.

Sciences 1: Natural Sciences Curatorial Course, in collaboration with BCG, GCG and Leicester Museums, 7 March - 11 March 1994

A practical look at collecting and field recording techniques, preservation, conservation, storage, documentation, taxonomy and research. The course will discuss those aspects of curation which are specific to the natural sciences. It will include field and laboratory work, lectures and seminars. It will discuss in equal measure good practice in geology and biology.

This one week course replaces the Sheffield based Natural Sciences Curatorial Course. It aims to build upon the success of the Sheffield course particularly in its continued commitment to practical work but with the added incentive of potentially contributing to a recognised qualification in museum studies. The course is also run on a firmer footing as it no longer depends on student numbers to run.

Sciences 2: Communicating Science, 14 March - 18 March 1994

A look at how museums communicate science. This wide ranging course will examine techniques used in science and discovery centres, in exhibition, site interpretation, publication and education. Again the focus will be on developing techniques and knowledge which can be applied directly in the museum. It is for scientists of all disciplines.

Cost per course is £220. B&B accommodation is available at £13-£20 per night. I am afraid that the Department is no longer able to provide University accommodation for its part-time students, however, private accommodation lists will be sent on request. Contact: Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princes Road East, Leicester, LE1 7LG. Tel 0533 523963, Fax 0533 523960.

Simon Knell

PUBLICATIONS

Preserving Natural Science Collections: Chronicle of our Environmental Heritage is by W. Donald Duckworth, Hugh Genoways and Carolyn Rose. This American publication, now available through the National Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Property, synthesises information gathered from meetings, calls for public education about the importance and uses of natural science collections, and recommends the creation of a natural science conservation training programme. (Does that sound vaguely familiar?). Available from NIC, 3299 Street, NW, Suite 403, Washington, D.C. 20007 price \$16.50 incl p&p.

Index Kewensis. This important botanical publication is now available on compact disc at £995. The disc comprises the original publication plus all nineteen supplements published since 1893. Contact Janet Caldwell, Customer Services Manager, Electronic Publishing, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP (tel 0865 267979).

Beetles of Somerset by Andrew Duff contains details in 270 pages of 2298 local species giving a status summary, notes on dispersion, habitat, periodicity and national status with lists of all accepted records. Available from Somerset Archeological and Natural History Society, Taunton Castle, Taunton, TA1 4AD at £12.25 incl UK p&p.

Passages from The Natural History of Selbourne, Naturalist's Journal and other writings by Gilbert White is a selection of classics illustrated by the addition of wood engravings by Thomas Bewick. Available direct from Silent Books, Boxworth End, Swavesey, Cambridge, CB4 5RA for £11.20 incl p&p.

MEETING REPORTS

The care of spirit Preserved collections Seminar

The BCG seminar was a resounding success in spite of the IRA and their Reading bomb which resulted in one speaker and some delegates not making it past Cardiff and a second speaker being ill. Not many seminars these days have a waiting list for participants - thanks to Kathie Way and her superb organisation.

It was a singularly worthwhile day for all concerned - speakers and delegates alike - a full appraisal will appear in a future newsletter. It was good to see so many younger workers of the profession participating and a salutary lesson for some older members on how much we take for granted, how much we still don't know and how much we can still learn from each other. This was definitely a meeting in the Reg Harris tradition (see BCG Special Publication no 3 and the last Journal of Biological Curation). We obviously need a follow up meeting, with perhaps more time for a general discussion and maybe even a series of hands on workshops.

*Rosina Down,
University College, London*

SPNHC Conference, Victoria, June 1993: Flood Disaster at the Texas A & M University

The Conference was opened with a talk by Dr Geoff Scudder of the University of British Columbia. He talked about the importance of research collections in museums to those scientists who are endeavouring to uncover the mysteries of the natural world. He quoted many historical examples of discovery through museum collection research, adding that much time and expense would have been saved if some famous naturalists had started their groundwork in a museum collection rather than in the field. Using this maxim and the importance of precise field data, he pointed out the mistakes made by Darwin with the Galapagos finches and the muddling of their original but vague collection data. This has been subsequently re-worked by Sulloway (1982). He also quoted Batesian mimicry, by the palatable Viceroy butterfly, of the unpalatable Monarch but then, ironically, wiped out by pesticides; the interbreeding of butterflies caused by glaciation of ecosystems and the parallel effects caused by global warming if the boreal regions were to warm up by 8°C. The mention of DNA caused much rustling of paper as he quoted the recent research into specification of Miocene termites in amber - the oldest DNA yet extracted (15-30M years) and the subsequent elaboration of this and DNA cloning by the film *Jurassic Park*. He finished by advising curators and conservators against the required pulverising of