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Where a new collection is set up, or an old one re-curated, the opportunity to monitor the condition of the specimens should be taken.

Experiments should be set up to assess the long-term effects of diverse preservatives, containers and storage conditions on a wide range of plant material.

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LIFE AFTER DEATH II

An account of the UKIC Natural Sciences Conference

24 Feb 1994 at Liverpool Museum

Well, having been many moons in gestation the first UKIC natural sciences section meeting finally blossomed at Liverpool Museum. Possibly to ensure that this meeting would be at least slightly different, no sooner had we arrived than the fire alarms went off and we all had to troop out into the cold and damp Liverpool morning. This was only a temporary diversion however, and not enough to stop the meeting starting on time.

Having renewed our by now cold drinks, we got down to business. We began with Simon Moore and his chums, who had plenty to show us from their study trip to North America. It turns out that even the Canadians have their problems, despite the glowing reports we often get from there - which is not to say they haven't achieved an enormous amount which they clearly have.

Wendy Simkiss continued the morning with more studying, this time closer to home, in Cambridge, where she spent eight weeks on the geological conservation course. This looks like an entertaining as well as an educational experience, but it was pointed out that few curators were going to be able to get an eight week slot to attend the course. Anything shorter possible?

Jeanette Pearson told us how they had gone about restoring the Maidenhall Mammoth to at least something like its former glory. A very interesting talk showing how less than ideal conditions were coped with, something which most of us regard as the normal state of affairs.

Adrian Doyle completed the morning with a wry account of the refurbishment of the marine reptiles at the NHM. I thought that it was a pity that more hadn't been done on the interpretation of the material. After all, it doesn't come much better than this. (PS - have you got any spare ones ?)

Following a superb lunch, Kirsten Walker opened the afternoon session by showing us how they were going about improving the lot of the collections at the Horniman Museum. Again, another story of coping with dubious circumstances, and a major undertaking which would be interesting written up as a case study.

Marion Kites' contribution was in some ways the most interesting of the day dealing as it did with the conservation of natural history material after it has been turned into social history material in the form of clothes and ornaments. This is an angle that most of us rarely consider.

Jenny Moore gave us a light-hearted account of two problems currently being dealt with at the NHM, namely how to deal with an herbarium when someone has dropped a bomb on it, and what to do when your glue has been turned into condoms. Whatever next!

Angus Gunn finished off by giving a summary of a recent survey of methods and materials used in British herbaria. It was a pity more people didn't respond to the requests for information, but the replies that came back revealed a surprisingly wide range.

The afternoon session was followed by the section's AGM, which included a short time for discussion - people were examining their watches by this time. The one issue which was discussed was the provision of training in conservation. No conclusions were drawn on this occasion but it is an ever recurring topic and an area the section could usefully contribute to.

As you can see, a wide-ranging meeting, and a very appropriate first meeting, giving us a taste of what we might expect to see covered in future events. It was reassuring to see such a good turnout, as the attendance of over fifty delegates exceeded the current membership. Hopefully this will increase as a result of the meeting. I was a little disappointed to see so few curators (only a dozen or so) as we had hoped the section would draw together the curatorial and conservation communities, but perhaps we will do better in future. All in all, an enjoyable and promising meeting. Our thanks to Angus and his colleagues for their excellent organisation.

Steve Thompson
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