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As no election was required, the Secretary proposed and Jo Hatton seconded that, the names put forward are accepted en block for election to the committee. The candidates were duly elected nem. con.

12. Election of Auditors

Bob Entwistle nominated Velson Horie and William Lindsey to continue as auditors. Passed nem.con.

13. Insurance for Natural Science Conservators

Simon Moore made another approach to the membership for freelancers to make use of the competitive insurance cover available from Crowley Colosso for both Public Liability and Professional Indemnity. He reported that a price of £250 for both was quoted by this company, and is a very competitive price being at least half that of other quotes. This would be an important saving for our freelance membership and such a chance should not be allowed to pass. Anyone who is interested should contact Simon. He has been approached by other non-natural science conservators to be included but this is not possible. He cannot benefit from this deal unless we have 10 or more people who are interested.

14. AOB.

Simon Moore reported that UKIC would like us to re-join the UKIC. A member asked whether we would be allowed to keep our low membership fee under the UKIC umbrella. This would be negotiable. Bob Entwistle thought that we might lose the voice we already have on the NCC-R (National Council of Conservators & Restorers). Simon invited the membership to discuss this matter in print in the Newsletter [Likewise similar discussion on the possible alternative step of merging with BCG & GCG].

Possibilities for the next AGM are Cambridge or Oxford, date to be arranged.

Close of Meeting 1pm.



The Ten Agents of Deterioration: Physical Forces.

Part nine of the Ten Agents will be published as soon as we have enough articles to make it worth while.

Please send any items for inclusion to the Editor.



ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS NSCG / BCG / GCG CONFERENCE

Conference in Scarborough, Yorkshire Monday April 3rd - Tuesday April 4th

After battling through the elements of a northerly gale, torrential rain, snow, delayed trains, car breakdowns and police problems, the healthy number of 80+ delegates gathered for registration at the Spar conference Centre overlooking the stormy south bay. The conference was opened by Harry Dickton, Mayor of Scarborough who reflected a healthy regard for the museum community, which bodes well for the future of Scarborough Museums. The morning session was then chaired by Rob Huxley of the Natural History Museum, London, and Biology Curators Group.

Simon Knell of Museum Studies Department of Leicester University gave the first presentation on *Access - Physical & Intellectual*. How do we communicate the museum message, and what media do we use to reach our audiences? We need to continue to build from our museum resources and popularise our natural sciences by developing popular exhibitions, discovery centres, web sites, exportable collection databases and public interaction in the field (e.g. fungus forays etc.) He introduced the concepts of inclusion and exclusion to museums and how social, political and racial changes need to be addressed. In the 19th century museums were the preserves of the middle classes, the product of exclusive societies (much like today's middle class golf clubs). Natural History collections became immensely popular as the population became emancipated and came to 'own' their museums. One needs to increase audience diversity. Many who do not visit museums are disenfranchised, such as ethnic minorities and the disabled who can be the victims of tokenism (e.g. wheelchair ramps and stuffed rabbits to stroke), special provision highlighting that they are different. How do we allow our Community access to the museum experience? Different communities see things differently with their own valid paradigms with their own views on postmodernism, constructivism, post-colonialism, multiculturalism, fashion, finance and politics. Are our views on access to our collections too scientific and what do different communities consider important? Do we try to too hard to illustrate processes

with objects and not the objects themselves? We must be honest in what we do and tell others. There is money available for research into education. The Group for Gallery Education has 800 members and there is £340000 available in grants.

Joe Sage of Dundee City Council Arts & Heritage talked about Best Value (BV) for Collection care. As a service Manager and Natural History preparator, he has been involved in Dundee's BV evaluation recently. The collections should

1. Reflect the needs of local communities,
2. be accountable to those communities, and
3. be of Best Value i.e. efficient, effective and economic.

It is a legal requirement that Councils review BV every 5 years (20% of the council's business each year). Methods for BV include, Market testing by tendering, benchmarking and comparison with performance indicators, and pilot studies looking at how others have done it. One needs to assess the political climate, and determine the views of those in charge in the Council and be certain of the remit and how the BV should be organised and what performance indicators should be used. An audit trail is required which describes how the BV was done. One needs to define the service under review by assessing job descriptions, identifying tasks, recognising the difference between theory & practice and rank tasks by the relative times spent doing them. Such a BV study can look similar to a food web. One must consult stakeholders both internal and external on what information is required and to inform them of survey methods. The results must be interpreted and the service redefined after identifying gaps between actual and expected service provision. One needs to determine the critical success factors by cost, response time, and attainment of deadlines, quality & professional standards and diversity of skills. What is the cost of service delivery? Establish the fixed cost, the variable cost and regular income. Market test by drawing up specs and inviting tenders both in and out of house. An options appraisal considering critical success factors, the consequences of different options and verification of cost implications is needed and the development of a continuous improvements strategy. A BV report with the above strengthens status and not to do such effectively could mean that the service will suffer.

Julian Carter, conservator from the National Museum and Galleries of Wales, Cardiff spoke on the *Hidden Treasure* in our collections. Where are the valuable specimens? How do we prioritise specimens? Often specimens with little scientific value (i.e. no data or unknown provenance) can have an educational value. The act of databasing and placing into new storage, improves ones own access to a collection. Specimens should be selected for hands-on activities. Specimens in spirit are not very accessible to the public having health & safety prohibitions. A

spider in a block of resin makes it accessible for handling yet is not accessible for microscopic study, dissection or DNA study.

John Martin of Leicester City Museums - *The Culture question: Fossils as Property*. When in the ground fossils are not accessible, even less so than when in private collections. Mary Anning became a professional fossil collector to supply the developing market for fossil specimens at the end of the 18th century. The rock quarrying trade provided many early specimens such as at Barrow on Soar, Leicestershire. Such present day trade is fraught with danger, as in Brazil where there is no legal way of getting fossils. Peasant quarry workers have to give their finds to armed middle men, who then pass on the specimens to the illegal export market and further middle men. Dinosaur eggs from Hainan, China have been smuggled out, and are now being exchanged for research purposes by museums and can be further made accessible by joint publication with Chinese workers. One egg possessed fossil dermestid frass in a dead embryo! Vertebrate fossils are worth money so if you wish to acquire them for science and as cultural property, one has to be involved in the trade. The 'Unidroit' code of ethics says that we cannot touch smuggled specimens so they cannot be published thus losing further access to these specimens.

Geoff Hancock from the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow described his museum as being difficult for casual visiting, due to the location and poor signs. The University student audience is primary with local interest groups second. With the help of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, New metal 'Halucirnia or Value-unia' units with drawers below are being installed and computer terminals for database (zip spreadsheets) access. Such developments are firmly part of the University's core aims of education and research.

Gillian Mason, Education Officer at The Hancock Museum, Newcastle - *Hands on Hands off*. Of the 125,000 visitors to the Hancock 70% are families, 20% schools and 5% experts. The museum was run by Newcastle University, and most of the collections were not accessible until it was subcontracted to the City Council. There have been three recent projects to enhance access. 'Objects of Desire' involved 1000 people from different communities and schools who selected their favourite objects for display (by the people for the people) in four different museums. At the Hancock, four groups were approached; disabled, primary school, Natural History Society and a local water company. People from these groups were selected and then taken through the museum's stores by a curator and an education officer to select their choices. These specimens are displayed with quotes by the selectors as to why they selected the specimens. The exhibition will involve the selectors and will travel to other sites such as schools. This project attracted a £130,000 grant, has two staff, and is designed to break down barriers

between the different communities and groups in the North East. The Earthworks permanent gallery was opened in 1998 after careful planning with geology curators. Glass-topped drawers below display cases have 'open me' written on them. A large amount of visual display with little text, but with books attached to the wall for extra information. Some samples are stuck down and can be touched. The museum can accommodate special needs schools and has an advocacy group for adults with learning difficulties. An intellectual audit was completed by approaching different user groups to ask them what was good and bad about their museum visits. Multifunctional activity trolleys are now being used for activity sessions with selected fossil specimens.

Judith Scott, Education Officer at NMGW Cardiff - *Educational Access to Natural History Collections*. Galleries were evaluated by observing visitor behaviour to identify distractions and unfocused school visits. By hooking specific audiences one can increase visitor numbers. This year is 'maths year' and the National Curriculum has a requirement to apply maths. Trails have been designed through the galleries to test maths, some being adult teacher led and others are designed for group work. Biodiversity has been linked with maths, using maps and keys to identify organisms. There is a giant floor pie chart to reflect biodiversity, for example leaf shape and petal number, tree rings, ant activity, moth symmetry, and measure a humpback whale etc. So using the maths 'hook', more natural history can be explored. Maths teachers that have been involved have been impressed, sessions have been fully booked and the displays can be improved from evaluation feedback sheets.

Andy Newman of the Museums Studies Department at The University of Newcastle talked about what functions do museums have and what messages do objects portray? We need a conceptual model. How much do museums reflect community identity and are museums about people, collections or identity? Museum objects can form the focus of a community, a sense of place, giving an identity of ethnic, social and cultural traditions and may help enforce this or even change it. Museums are one element of identity and can be targeted for destruction as in Yugoslavia as part of the ethnic cleansing process. Interpretation of those objects can be changed to suit the cultural needs as well. Natural Science collections can give a relationship between community and the natural environment, instil local and national pride and appreciation and, especially if a spirit of ownership and collective memory can be instilled can change the way one perceives who one is and where one is from. This gives a sense of inclusion into citizenship that is sometimes, not shared by minorities. Developments in geological science changed views of creation away from biblical theology and who we are as a biological species. Eco-museums and their links with heritage sites help in this and human links made with specimens can make them more interesting and valuable.

Alistair Bowden talked about his leadership of the integrated interpretation project 'Dinosaur Coast', which is to conserve heritage by raising awareness of the history and development of fossils in the area. A weekend is planned of activities in the Spar conference centre and on Scarborough beach during the summer holiday period, with a guidebook, signed trails and advertising throughout Yorkshire. Regionally important geological sites will be visited. The area covered will be the Jurassic sediments on the coast between Staiths to Seeton including Whitby Museum and sites in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park.

In the evening, delegates gathered at the St Nicholas Hotel for the conference meal and afterwards at the Hole in the Wall, the preferred watering hole of the Scarborough Museum staff.

Tuesday morning the wind was still high but the sun shone for the third session chaired by Bob Entwistle from Ipswich Museum and chair of NSCG. Bob Child, head of Conservation at NMGW, Cardiff, discussed the storage facility and reserve collections at Nant Garw. Diverse objects from the many smaller stores now closed, have been moved to this new site. Only 5% of the NMGW holdings are displayed, the reserve collections consisting of duplicate and historic material which is a research resource, and which might double in size in the next twenty years. New exhibitions have had fewer specimens, relying on more interpretative information. The Nant Garw site is four miles out of Cardiff and the curators have had to decide what should go there. It is aimed to be a viable public utility and not a dump for discarded objects. In order to fulfil MGC registration criteria it needs/better standards of collection care and better access for staff and public. The conservation laboratories and stores will be open to public visits.

Vicky Purewal also of NMGW, Cardiff talked on *Access to Potentially Hazardous Collections*. Treatments applied to collections were often not documented in the past, and often the only indications of chemicals present are smells, such as in naphthalene and discolouration caused by methyl bromide. Analysis of residues on botany sheets held at NMGW, Cardiff has revealed arsenic, barium and mercuric chloride, but no evidence for paradichlorobenzene. Many old collections may be similarly hazardous such as those at Oxford and Cambridge. The presence of notifiable poisons could mean the closure of access to collections and the disposal of contaminated collections would be expensive. Blood and urine tests occur yearly for staff in contact with such collections that costs £40/year. In enclosed stores with no air circulation, high concentrations of poison vapour may build up so stores should have ventilation. In addition, fume hoods should be made available for safely inspecting suspect materials. The paper sheets hold more contaminants than the plant material, thus remounting the material can reduce the hazard by as much as 40 times.

Hazel Newey from The Science Museum, London described Blythe House store, which is shared with the Victoria & Albert Museum. This store holds 83% of the collections and much of the Welcome collection. It is an old building with 99 small rooms, which have blocked windows and no working areas within the store-rooms. There are few large items and most material is on open shelving. Small items are stored in plastic trays in glass-fronted cabinets. Radioactive and lead objects are labelled up with H. & S. labels. Last year there were 680 visitors, made up of 90 groups of professionals, specialists and a corporate sponsor evening visit. The store for large objects is at the old RAF airfield at Wroughton, Swindon. Items stand on pallets on floor or on open Dexion racking with Plastazote padding. Many objects came from the old store at Hayes where maintenance costs were high and environmental conditions not controlled. At Wroughton the A1 building is purpose built with environmental control and some mobile racking and high-level fork lift access. The seven airfield hangers hold the aircraft and motor vehicles, two of which are densely packed with vehicles. Last year there were 30,000 visitors during a series of open weekends. Only one staff member is required for every 15 visitors, to supervise as in the past; visitors have taken parts off vehicles. The 'Navy Yard' site will become the National Collection Centre with educational facilities.

Douglas Russell of Woodend Museum, Scarborough, is spending a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for the documentation of 104,000 specimens held in the Scarborough Museum supervised by Jane Mee. Specimens were housed in the Rotunda of 1829, where access was poor. They were moved in 1950 to Wood End, the collection consists of the Bean Shell collection, eggs, birds and a herbarium in a poor state, many of which were piled into the attic and lately were in bin bags. The 34,000 Mollusca were re-curated in 1969. In 1996 the collections were assessed, and the resulting document became a benchmark for improvement. A HLF grant for £98,000 was awarded over 3 years for new storage and study area furniture, computer with MODES and a full time worker.

Carolyne Buttler NMGW, Cardiff. Casting a fossil skeleton can widen its audience and can be sold to raise funds (£100,000 for a T. Rex). Casts can become important specimens in their own right, such as the Diplodocus at The Natural History Museum, London. The originals can be too fragile for handling and be environmentally sensitive, such as with pyritised specimens. On the South Welsh coast, at a late Triassic SSSI, a set of dinosaur footprints were being eroded by wave action. During the 6-hour low tide window of opportunity, the footprints were cast, using a thin and then a thick layer of silicone rubber, this was reinforced with gauze bandage before removal, cleaning, painting. The footprint casts are now being displayed in the museum, thus making them accessible.

In the afternoon a convoy of cars made their way to Crook Ness with Alistair Bowden to find fossil dinosaur footprints, that had recently fallen from the cliffs. Luckily, the weather had ameliorated. Then we visited Whitby Museum and were guided by Peter Thornton and Graham Pickles as well as Adrian Doyle, who had helped Kate Andrew on the conservation of the wall mounted fossil marine reptiles. The museum was set up by the local Literary and Philosophical Society to display material collected from the local quarry trade. Some of the quarry managers became interested in the fossils, and soon the best alum beds were indicated by certain species of fossil ammonite. The wall-mounted reptiles were previously suffering from incursion of damp from a leaking roof and pyrite decay had started. The lamp black & varnish recipe coating the specimens was removed with nitromores and ammonia hydroxide was applied to stop the pyrite decay. Polyethylene Glycol was then applied to conserve the specimens. The museum is a mixture of natural history with fossils and faded bird and fish specimens as well as local community ephemera linked to the fishing industry. We inspected the 'What's in Store' exhibition of a wide variety of objects from store housed in Dexion and perspex sheeting, however, with odd gaps that have allowed too much access by small hands to some exhibits.

The other tour of the afternoon was led by Douglas Russell to view the Woodend Museum building up the hill from the Rotunda. In this building, we saw the roof stores with steep stairs and bad access. Attic rooms were still piled on the floors with mammals and birds in plastic sheeting and occasional bin bags. Some should be disposed of, as many labels were removed by a previous staff member. An old library exists with few new titles. Valuable specimens include the type specimen of the Pigmy antelope collected by Colonel Harrison in 1926 and a Yorkshire example of the Bald Eagle. The collections are primarily used as a resource for display specimens. Displays in the main museum describe the tunny fishery and local habitats illustrated by dioramas of such localities as Bempton cliffs, the famous seabird colony.

