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## **NSCG Newsletter**

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Although courses such as this are quite regularly held in North America, particularly under the auspices of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, this is the first course of its kind on this side of the Atlantic. At a time when the need to preserve this important part of our heritage is gaining greater recognition, it is not likely to be the last.

I would like to thank the course organiser and tutors for their advice and assistance throughout the course and the Museums and Galleries Commission for a grant towards the cost.

*Jill Kerr*  
*Ulster Museum*



This five week course was set up and co-ordinated by Chris Collins of the Geological Conservation Unit, University of Cambridge and was divided into three components at three institutions: two weeks at Cambridge (Geological Conservation Unit), one at The Natural History Museum, London (Botany Department) and two weeks at the National Museums & Galleries, Wales (Conservation team within Geology, Botany and Zoology).

The modular nature of the course meant that only one other participant attended the course at the same time as myself. Jill Kerr, the natural history conservator for the Ulster Museum. With just two of us this gave rise to very relaxed sessions which proved more accommodating to our individual needs. The course aim is to provide a solid overview of the factors which influence the deterioration of natural science materials, how collections are maintained and how conservation problems could be resolved. This was achieved by a good course structure and balance between theory, documentation and practical work.

The first week was an introduction covering many aspects of preventive conservation. Agents of deterioration, health and safety, ethics, materials

science, and surveying whole collections were discussed. A number of collections were reviewed (zoological, anthropological and geological) and a survey report was written for each. Particular attention was given to condition surveys of collections and specimens to stress the importance of documentation. The subsequent weeks focused on particular types of collection and their associated problems, working alongside the conservator or curator responsible for specific collections. All aspects of conservation were considered both on a large scale and at collection and specimen level.

The course has been of great value to me as a curator. In five weeks a wide range of conservation problems and possible solutions in all fields of natural history was covered. The informal structure and flexibility of this course is ideally suited to small groups and, with such competent tutors, will adequately accommodate the needs of museum workers from a variety of backgrounds and levels of knowledge. One of the great strengths of the course was its division into three placements. This provides an opportunity to see how different collections work in practice. In addition to this, by working alongside the individual conservators in their own workplace different approaches are revealed that may not become apparent from a formal teaching structure. I believe this course has given me both the knowledge and confidence to tackle conservation issues in my workplace.

I would like to thank all of the conservators and curators involved in the teaching of this course and also to express my gratitude to the Museums & Galleries Commission who awarded me a grant towards the cost of the course.

*Suzanne Lewis*  
*Lead Curator – Hymenoptera*  
*Department of Entomology*  
*The Natural History Museum*