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One Year Secondment to Canada
- Suzanne Lewis: Lead Curator & Conservation Officer
Entomology Department, The Natural History Museum, London

I have been a curator in the Entomology department of the Natural History Museum, London for 12 years now. After successfully completing an MA in Museum Studies I was looking to further continue my career development. One way I felt I could achieve this was by working with another collection and or in a different institute. After consideration I recognised that the care and conservation of collections is my particular interest and direction. For this reason I looked to Canada at the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) and the Canadian Museum of Nature (CMN). I applied to do two, three-month internships at CCI and also contacted Rob Waller, Chief conservator at the CMN to suggest the possibility of a work exchange.

I left London at the beginning of October 2001 to start the first of two internships at CCI. This was a wonderful opportunity as CCI is recognised internationally as a pioneer in the conservation of cultural heritage. I spent six months at the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) working on two conservation projects. The first of which was an investigation of the suitability of Parylene N and Parylene C coatings for the preservation of entomological specimens. Thin films of parylene have been successfully used in a range of disciplines, some of which have been for the preservation of delicate and valuable artefacts, e.g. papers from the Titanic. Working with Malcolm Bilz at CCI our investigation is further development of work already carried out with parylene in conservation. The purpose of our study was to determine whether parylene coating entomological specimens is an effective and realistic method of indefinitely preserving these specimens without compromising the morphological characters that are critical for taxonomic research. It was hoped that coating a range of insect specimens would strengthen and protect them from environmental conditions that cause deterioration without obscuring or altering morphological features necessary for the identification of the specimen or inhibiting the extraction of DNA. The results and conclusions were very encouraging and have been submitted to *Collection Forum*.

The second internship was a joint project with Tom Strang from CCI, Rob Waller, CMN and myself, undertaken largely at the Canadian Museum of Nature. The project was divided into three parts, firstly an evaluation of pest control features included in the design and construction of the museum building. Pest control data was collected and compared from other new collection facilities around the world and finally a risk model for pests in museums was produced. The pest risk model is the most significant and exciting piece of work produced during this internship. It is hoped that this work will be written up and published in the coming year.

From April to October 2002 I benefited from working at the CMN on an exchange with the only Entomology curator and was responsible for loan, visitors, enquiries, exhibition liaison, tours to the collection in addition to recurating and labelling the majority (approximately 200 drawers) of the Curculionidae (weevil) collection. The Entomology collection is largely made up of Coleoptera with approximately 700,000 prepared specimens. In addition to my curatorial work I spent 20% of my time at CMN working with Rob Waller's team of Conservators and continued the pest project I had started at CCI.

My year in Canada was rewarding both for personal and professional development. Leaving everything and everyone behind for a whole year can be difficult but it was definitely worth it to meet and work with a huge range of friendly professionals.

CCI was created in 1972 to provide the proper care and preservation of Canada's cultural heritage and to advance the practice, science and technology of conservation. The Institute has worked closely with hundreds of museums, art galleries, academic institutions, and other heritage organisations to help them better preserve their collections. As a Special Operating Agency of the Department of Canadian Heritage, CCI has widened its scope of activities and now markets its services and products around the world. CCI is a very different working environment to that of a museum as it has no collection and is driven by conservation research and solving problems for the museum environment. I found my time at CCI incredibly valuable, having so many conservators working on so many disciplines in the same building. Everyone was so friendly and helpful I was able to gain a huge amount of information and a completely different perspective to museum work.

The natural history collections at The Canadian Museum of Nature were moved to the Natural Heritage Building, a purpose built collection and research facility in 1997. I had the great fortune to work in this building. This was useful in many ways as the Entomology department at the Natural History Museum, London plan to move their collections to a new building in the near future. It was interesting to see what features were added to this purpose built facility and how everyday work with the collections had been improved. I was made very welcome at CMN by all the staff and they were again so friendly and helpful they made my stay both enjoyable and useful.

I would like to offer my special thanks to:

Malcolm Bilz & David Grattan - Conservation Processes & Materials Research, CCI

Tom Strang - Preventive Conservation, CCI

Rob Waller & Conservation team, CMN

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Mike Fitton, David Carter & Dick Vane-Wright - Entomology Department, NHM

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