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Author(s): Whiteley, D.

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GROUP FOR MEDICAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS FORMED

The London of Health and Medicine and the Thackray Medical Museum, Leeds organised a very successful meeting on Thursday 9th October 1997 to discuss the formation of a group interested in Medical History Collections.

The meeting took place at the newly opened Thackray Museum. The meeting was attended by over forty people from a variety of backgrounds - including Curators, Librarians and Archivists. Speakers came from the London Museums of Health and Medicine, the Science Museum and the Science and Industry Collections Group. The meeting overwhelmingly endorsed the need for an annual meeting and some form of directory or contact list to provide opportunities for people in this field to network. A steering group was set up to organise the first meeting.

The Group is not a replacement for or an extension of the London Museums of Health and Medicine (which will continue to exist), but is an informal group which will meet infrequently, but at least once a year, and which will help those interested in Medical History Collections to exchange and share ideas and information.

Contact: Emma Bond,
British Red Cross Museum
9, Grosvenor Crescent
LONDON, SW1X 7EJ
Tel: 0171 201 5400

NEWS FROM SHEFFIELD

After several years of uncertainty and turmoil the way ahead seems to be coming clearer. No doubt rumours and horror stories are circulating amongst the BCG grapevines. Well some big changes are on the way so I'll tell you what I know because they may have an impact on some of you in the future.

Trustification We are to be trustified in April 1998 [so soon] Sheffield City Museum & Mappin Art Gallery [merged three years ago] will be run together with the Ruskin Gallery and the Graves Gallery as an independent "Cultural Trust" grant aided by the City Council. Shadow board members include Sir Hugh Sykes and Lord Dainton amongst others. We have verbal assurance that collections and buildings will remain in Local Authority ownership, but staff and functions will be moved to the Trust. The new Millennium Gallery in the heart of the city now has the green light and will also join the Trust in due course.

Stabilisation Funding from the new Stabilisation Lottery Fund has now been approved to come on line in April 1998. 1.2 million pounds spread over three years will fund improvements in exhibitions, marketing, shop and cafe, events, small building projects; and some additional staff. There is no allocation to natural history as such but access and collection care should benefit from the general upward spiral.

Ecology Unit The City Ecology Unit, formed at the museum in 1986, is now administered by Leisure Services Directorate, although for the time being Jean Glasscock and Lucy Heath are still based in offices at the museum. Sheffield Biological Records Centre is run jointly with the CEU. Jean provides a site-based service and the museum provides a species-based service, and communications between the two are good. The CEU will not be "trustified" next year.

New Store Movement of collections to a new remote store continues. Some of you will know the Annexe-that old cramped house across the road from the museum which has been the biology store for too many years. Well, gradually we are moving collections out to more modern and spacious accommodation. The herbarium is the latest collection to move to very smart surroundings. Much of the restoration and re-housing work has been grant-aided by Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council.

The Weston Project We are working with a successful lottery team from Leisure Services on a big multi-million pound bid to the HLF for massive capital improvements to the City Museum & Mappin and surrounding Victorian parks. This team has just secured a 6 million pound award to restore Sheffield Botanical Gardens. Part of the Weston Project involves completely rebuilding and redesigning the museum interior, galleries, storage areas, roof, you name it!

Well that brings you more or less up to date. The Natural History Centre attracted 16,000 visitors in 6 months, and a mini-version is being run by Nina Standing at weekends and holidays. Paul, Gaynor, and I have survived the savage cuts and work goes on!

Derek Whiteley