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The Biology Curator

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Manchester University, UK, 19-21 April 1995

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International Conference on the Value and Valuation of Natural Science Collections

Manchester University, UK, 19-21 April 1995

Introduction

This important conference, instigated by the Biology Curator's Group and organised by the Manchester Museum, will address a subject that is very timely, to judge from the responses we have received from around the world. This special issue of the *Biology Curator* contains the pre-conference printed Abstracts of the talks and poster papers offered. Since the topic is not one easily summarised in a poster presentation, some of the poster papers are published in full here, after the Abstracts.

Aim of the Conference

Natural science collections have scientific, cultural and monetary values. The conference will explore the nature of these various values and will reflect the experience of those involved in the care and use of such collections

It is often said that natural science collections are undervalued (in all senses of the word) when compared with humanities-based collections, particularly those of fine art objects. Is this true? If so, is it a consequence of the way society views the arts and the sciences? Or is it because art collections can have such high financial values? What can be done to increase society's appreciation of the many values of natural science collections? What pressures are there upon museums and other holding institutions to put financial values on their natural science collections, and should such pressures be welcomed or resisted? In responding to such pressures, is there a risk that the intrinsic scientific and cultural value of natural science collections is at best undermined, and at worst sold out? The publication resulting from the conference will help to answer some of these questions, and inform future policy decisions about natural science collections.

Venue

The conference will be held at the Hulme Hall Conference Centre. Hulme Hall is the oldest established residence in the University of Manchester and is situated on a 9 acre site in the quiet and pleasant Victoria Park, only 10 minutes walk from the centre of the University campus. Direct bus services leave every 2 minutes via the University to the centre of Manchester, and every half hour to the Airport. There is ample car-parking at no extra charge. Facilities include a 300 seat tiered lecture theatre with disabled access and induction loop, seminar rooms, dining hall, licensed bar, on-site squash, tennis, netball, table-tennis, pool tables and multi-gym, photocopying and FAX facilities, bleep and private radio systems.

Programme Outline

Reflecting the aims of the Conference, three major themes will be pursued during the various scientific sessions. These sessions will examine the **SCIENTIFIC VALUE** and **CULTURAL VALUE** of natural science collections, and address the question of the **FINANCIAL VALUE** of these collections.

The last theme presents four aspects - what pressures are there to provide financial valuations for natural science

collections, what commercial valuations are *de facto* in existence already, what are the arguments for and against assessing such monetary values and, if we have to value, how should the consequent risks be minimised?

The final debate session will endeavour to draw together all these disparate threads, and attempt to define the principles that should inform future policy decisions about natural science collections.

Provisional Programme

Tuesday 18th April

- 1000-1400 Manchester Museum Collections available for inspection (please contact us if you wish to take advantage of this opportunity)
- 1000-1800 Conference Reception Desk open for Registration.
- 1600-1700 Biology Curators' Group AGM
- 1700-1800 Presentation by the UK Systematics Forum, followed by refreshments.

Wednesday 19th April

- Session A:** *Chair: Tristram Besterman, Director, Manchester Museum.*
- 0930-1030 Keynote address, "The scientific value of collections"
The Earl of Cranbrook DSc DL, Chairman, English Nature.
- 1030-1050 "What's important?"
Simon Knell, Museum Studies, University of Leicester.
- Session B:** *Chair: Dr Goran Andersson, Director, Natural History Museum, Goteborg, Sweden*
- 1130-1150 "Calculating the real value of systematic biology collections"
Dr Stephen Blackmore, Nicola Donlon & Emma Watson, The Natural History Museum, London.
- 1150-1210 "The fundamental relationship between biological collections and scientific knowledge"
Woody Cotterill, Biodiversity Foundation for Africa, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.
- 1210-1230 "The Italian Association of Science Museums and its goals in regard to scientific collections"
Prof. Guido Moggi, Museo Botanico, Florence, Italy.
- 1230-1250 "Archives of nature in natural history collections"
Dr Dumitra Muraria, "Grigore Antipa" Museum of Natural History, Bucharest, Romania.
- Session C:** *Chair: Ms Sally Shelton, San Diego Natural History Museum, USA.*
- 1400-1420 "Collections assessments and long range planning"
Philip Doughty, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
- 1420-1440 "The National Zoological Collection of Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences"

	Dr Roald Potapov & Dr Vadim Zaitzev , Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia.	1230-1250	"A Dutch exercise in the valuation of natural history collections" Dr J Krikken , National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, The Netherlands.
1440-1500	"Microbial genetic resources: their use and organization" Dr D Smith , International Mycological Institute, Surrey.		
1500-1520	"The educational and ethical role of the National Museum of Natural History in the Scientific Institute" Prof. M Mouna , Scientific Institute, Rabat-Agdal, Morocco.	Session G: 1400-1420	<i>Chair:</i> To be announced. "A scientific/historical/educational heritage for whom? The value of geological collections in small museums" Simon Timberlake , Cambridge (South Eastern Museums Service).
Session D:	<i>Chair:</i> Dr Ian Rolfe , Royal Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh.	1420-1440	"Slaying the sacred cow" W J Baird , Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.
1600-1620	"Criteria for establishing the relative importance of natural history collections at international, national, and local levels" Dr Andrew Jeram , Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland.	1440-1500	"An attempt at valuating the zoological reference collection of the Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore" Kelvin K P Lim & Mrs C M Yang , National University of Singapore.
1620-1640	"Depreciation, appreciation and inflation: the economics of botanical collections" Dr David G Mann , Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.	1500-1520	"From grave to cradle, the changing fortunes of the giant Irish deer" Nigel Monaghan , National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.
1640-1700	"Scientific and didactic criteria of valuing unique geological specimens (moveable monuments of inanimate nature) in experience of the Museum of the Earth Sciences, Warsaw" Prof. K Jakubowski , Museum of the Earth, Warsaw, Poland.	Session H: 1600-1620	<i>Chair:</i> To be announced. "The effect of high market prices on the value and valuation of vertebrate fossils" Ms Sally Shelton , San Diego Natural History Museum, USA
1700-1720	"Notes on quality and economy of a natural history collection" Dr Karel Sutory , Moravian Museum, Brno, Czech Republic.	1620-1640	"Museums and the mineral specimen market" Ms Monica Price , Oxford University Museum.
Thursday 20th April		1640-1700	"The evaluation of natural history collections; some remarks" Dr Francesco Uribe , Museu de Zoologia, Barcelona, Spain.
Session E: 0930-1000	<i>Chair:</i> To be announced. Keynote address, "The cultural impact of collections" Max Hebditch , Director, Museum of London	1700-1720	"Targeting the user short term - who pays for long term storage and maintenance?" Professor Peter Morgan , National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.
1000-1030	Keynote address, "The cultural impact of natural science collections to society" C W Pettitt , Manchester Museum.	After Dinner	Ms Sally Shelton will give a talk entitled "Murder in the Museum"
1030-1050	Paper on ethics of disposal David Clarke , former Chair, Museums Association Ethics Committee.	Friday 21st April	
Session F:	<i>Chair:</i> Dr Barbara Hertzig , Natural History Museum, Vienna, Austria.	Session I: 0930-1010	<i>Chair:</i> Dr John Edmondson , National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside. Keynote address, "The financial value of cultural, heritage and scientific collections: an accounting fiction" Prof. G Carnegie & Prof. P Wolnizer , Deakin University, Victoria, Australia.
1130-1150	"The educational value of university natural history museums" Ms Jane Pickering , Oxford University Museum.	1010-1030	"Insurance implications of display of collections made up of unique items with little or no commercial market interest" Colin McBride , Willis, Faber & Dumas Ltd., (Insurance Brokers), London.
1150-1210	"Canada's experience at valuing scientific collections" Peter G Whiting , The Outspan Group, Ottawa, Canada.	1030-1050	Paper on valuing natural history collections S Rollo-Smith , Institute of Loss Adjusters
1210-1230	"Evaluating the earth sciences collections at the Royal Ontario Museum" Ms Janet Waddington , Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada.	Session J:	<i>Chair:</i> Prof. G Carnegie , Deakin University, Australia.

- 1130-1150 "Valuing, a professional's view"
R Gowland, Director, Phillips North West, (Auction House), Chester.
- 1150-1210 Paper on the public accountancy view of collections
Mr Martin Evans, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.
- 1210-1230 "Valuation and title in Law"
Prof. Norman Palmer, University College London.
- 1230-1250 "The cost of collecting: collection management in UK museums"
Barry Lord, Gail Dexter Lord & John Nicks, Lord Resources Ltd.

Session K: *Chair: Mr Peter Longman*, Director, Museums and Galleries Commission.

1400-1600 Debate on the value and valuation of the natural science collections

Session L: *Chair: Mr Peter Longman*, Director, Museums and Galleries Commission.

1630-1730 Agreement of the "Manchester Principles"

Poster Papers

"The cost of natural science specimen conservation versus value of collections"
K J Andrew, Geological Conservator and Collection Care Consultant, Worcestershire.

"The Natural History Museum of the University of Lisbon"
J M Brandao, Museu Nacional de Historia Natural, Lisbon.

"The Culture Collection of Algae and Protozoa - A living resource"
Dr J G Day, Institute of Freshwater Ecology, Windemere.

"Financial value of natural science collections of the Museu de Ciencias Naturais, Fundacao Zoobotanica do Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil."
Dr M H M Galileo, V L M Callegaro & V L I Pittoni, Museu de Ciencias Naturais, Porto Alegre RS, Brasil.

"The Malacological Collections of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences"
Dr J L van Goethem & T Backeljau, Inst. Royal des Sci. Nat. de Belgique, Bruxelles.

"*Strombus listeri* Gray, 1852 (Mollusca; Gastropoda); morals to be learnt from damage to one of the oldest known documented museum specimens - a retrospective valuation"
E G Hancock, Glasgow Museums.

"Collections as biogeographical archives"
Paul Harding, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Monks Wood.

"The collections of the National Museum of Natural History in the Scientific Institute, and environmental research in Morocco"
Dr O Himmi, Scientific Institute, Rabat-Agdal, Morocco.

"The Historical Collections of the Botanical Museum of Florence and their scientific value"
Dr C Nepi, Botanical Museum, Florence.

"The Educational Value of Natural History Collections"
Ms S D Tunnicliffe, School of Education, Kings College, London.

"Practical examples of the Appraisal and Valuation of Natural History Collections"
John A Woods, Appraisers, Connecticut, USA.

Registration fees:

Full delegate £125.00. Members of GCG/BCG/Linn.Soc./Syst.Ass./ unemployed/full-time students £90.00. Accompanying person £20.00.

Deadline for registrations from Members of Sponsoring Societies - 31st March 1995

What this includes:

Attendance at all sessions (except for accompanying persons)

Morning coffee, lunch & afternoon tea, 19th-21st April

Attendance at evening receptions

Organising Committee

Charles Pettitt (Manchester Museum) (Chairman)
John Nudds (Manchester Museum)
Mike Hounsome (Manchester Museum)
Sean Edwards (Manchester Museum)
Ken Joycey (University of Cambridge)
Ian Wallace (National Museums on Merseyside)
Philip Doughty (Ulster Museum)
Steve Garland (Bolton Museum)
Colin Reid (Dudley Museum)

Supporters

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Midlands Federation of Museums
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Museo Geominero-ITGE, Madrid
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 North West Museums Service
 Northern Ireland Museums Council
 Palaeontological Association
 Rijksherbarium, Leiden
 Scottish Museums Federation
 Scottish Natural Heritage
 South Eastern Museums Service
 Strecker Museum, Baylor Univ., Texas
 Swedish Museums Association
 Tyne and Wear Museums
 UK Institute for Conservation (Natural History)
 UK Museums Association
 Ulster Museum
 Victoria University Geology Department
 West Midlands Area Museums Service
 Western Australian Museum
 Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council
 Zoologisch Museum, Amsterdam

36 speakers from 16 countries

THE SPONSORS OF THE CONFERENCE.

The Manchester Museum, The Biology Curators' Group, The Geological Curators' Group, The Linnean Society of London, The Systematics Association, & The Group for Directors in Museums and Art Galleries.



The Manchester Museum

The collections and buildings of the Manchester Museum have a fascinating history. Their beginnings may be traced back to the foundation of the Manchester Society of Natural History in 1821 and some of our present collections were brought to the Museum in these early years. In 1835 an attractive classical style museum building (now demolished) was built in the centre of Manchester, and the collections of

the Manchester Geological and Mining Society were added to those of the Museum in 1850.

In 1867 the Governors of Owen's College (now the University of Manchester) undertook the administration of the museum. Shortly after Owen's College moved to its present site, a new museum building, designed by the architect Alfred Waterhouse, was built in 1888. Extensions were added in 1912 and 1927, again designed by the Waterhouse family, and presenting a homogeneous and distinguished elevation to Oxford Road. In 1977 the adjoining building (previously the Dental School) was taken over, and the Museum also has space in another University building nearby.

In addition to natural history the Museum has outstanding collections of Archaeology, Egyptology, Ethnology, and Numismatics, and also houses the Ingo Simon Archery Collection.

The Herbarium is one of the largest in the UK, and contains material from the voyages of the *Beagle*, from Linnaeus, and from Admiral Franklin's expeditions in search of the North West Passage. The major collections came from Charles Bailey and Cosmo Melville; Leo Grindon and Spruce are other well-known botanists whose collections rest here.

The Entomology department holds worldwide collections of nearly three million insects, the third largest and most comprehensive in the UK. The British collections (one and a quarter million specimens) are particularly comprehensive, with only a small percentage of known British species unrepresented.

Many of the extensive Geology collections were made in the second half of the 19th century. There are some ten thousand mineral specimens, a significant petrological collection, and several hundred thousand fossils, with many type, figured and cited specimens.

In Zoology the main strengths are the bird collections, notably the Dresser collection, and the Mollusca, which includes the collections of Darbishire, Haddon, Townsend, and Hadfield among many others. Other groups represented by important collections include the Bryozoa (Waters collection) and Foraminifera (Halkyard collection).

The Biology Curators' Group

The Group was founded 21 years ago, with the aim of improving the standing of biological curation. It holds Seminars and Conferences (such as the present one on Value and Valuation of Natural Science Collections), where various topics of interest to biology curators are discussed. Recently workshops have been held, to help curators develop their skills in various aspects of their work.

The Group publishes the *Biology Curator* (formerly the *Journal of Biological Curation*) three times a year.

Further details about the Group are available from the BCG Membership Secretary, Ms Kathy Way, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, SW7 5BD

The Geological Curators' Group

The *Geological Curators' Group* was founded in 1974 to improve the status of geology in museums and the standard of geological curation in general by:

- holding meetings and seminars
- the surveillance of geological collections
- documenting and conserving geological sites
- conducting surveys appropriate to these aims.

The *Geological Curators' Group* supports the work of those responsible for the hands-on care of collections, and seeks to advance their training and proficiency. We aim to set standards for curation and encourage their proper implementation. We alert the authorities at all levels to their responsibilities to collections and curators as well as to the science of geology itself. We actively seek to publicise and popularise the science and encourage only responsible and useful collection.

The *Geological Curator* is the the Group's journal. It contains articles concerning all areas of interest for Group Members; historical articles, techniques of conservation, preparation and display, reports of meetings, as well as reviews and news. The *Lost and Found* column is an invaluable aid for the exchange of information on collections.

Coprolite is the newsletter of the Group and complements the *Geological Curator*. Published three times a year, it contains up-to-date news of meetings, people, exhibitions and events.

Membership of the *Geological Curators' Group* is open to anyone interested in geology, and will be of particular interest to individuals or organisations responsible for the care of geological collections, the interpretation of geological specimens or sites, as well as historians of geology.

For further details please contact the GCG Secretary
c/o Geological Society of London
Burlington House
Piccadilly, London W2V 0JU

The Group for Directors in Museums

The Systematics Association

The Systematics Association was founded in 1937 as the "Committee on Systematics in Relation to General Biology and Evolution" to provide a forum for discussion of the general, theoretical and practical problems of taxonomy. Its first publication, *The New Systematics (1940)*, edited by Sir Julian Huxley, has since become a classic.

Since then, the Association has pioneered discussions on many new developments in biosystematics. The Special Volume series, developed from symposia organised by the Association, have been among the first in their respective fields to assess the implications of advances in the subject. Several symposia are organized each year by members of the Association. Topics covered have included chemotaxonomy, scanning electron microscopy, data processing, biological identification with computers, molecular biology, and the biosystematics and evolution of particular groups. *For further information contact:* Z. Lawrence, International Mycological Institute, Bakeham Lane, Egham, Surrey TW20 9TY, UK.

ABSTRACTS OF PROPOSED ORAL PRESENTATIONS.

SLAYING THE SACRED COW.

W.J. Baird, Geology Department, Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF

The proposal for this Conference posed a question:- "*It is often said that natural science collections are under valued (in all senses of the word) when compared with humanities based collections, particularly those of fine art objects*". Is this true? Unfortunately I consider that it is at least partially true when applied to science based collections and that we have only ourselves to blame. I believe that if we wish to be treated on the same footing as the humanities based collections we must become more rigorous in our collection policies and disciplines.

Collecting and storing objects is taken to extremes by humans and has been described as "the passionate pastime". With very few exceptions no collector wishes to be known as a collector of anything and everything. I know of few who through choice collect just anything and everything - broken, complete, incomplete, labelled, unlabelled. Such collections, stored in indifferent conditions, outdoors and indoors, uncatalogued and uncared for, do exist; they are known as junk shops. It is my opinion, and mainly for historical reasons, that in some areas of their collections certain National Museums are on their way to becoming little more than junk shops.

Most curators are by their very nature acquisitive collectors and by the limitations set upon us by lack of staff and storage space we are fast becoming simply hoarders of unclassified accumulations of objects. We continually add to our collections but we are not in the main upgrading these collections, leading to inadequate storage, inaccessible and badly curated material and conservation facilities become severely overstretched. I have so far not even raised the matter of what it costs to store and conserve specimens, but specimen housing is costly and has to be considered.

We have to be prepared to deaccession, within the framework of individual institutions' collections policies, material that has little or no scientific value. I believe there is no major collection which would not benefit from careful, considered pruning as part of a national policy of upgrading and rationalisation. The benefits of such a process would be considerable; savings in valuable storage space, improved curator moral, lower market prices for the standard level of museum objects [the price of the very top of the range acquisitions I would expect to remain high], better classified, conserved and more accessible collections. By using modern information storage facilities it is still possible to keep a lot of information about items even if they are not physically retained in an institution.

It is time the museum world came to its senses and put its house in order, decided sensible collecting policies and kept to them, put forward some accession ideals for the future and meant them. Perhaps under those circumstances governments could be encouraged to give us the increased funding and staff we will require in the short term to sort out the mess we have got ourselves into.