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displays. There are real tree trunks where bark rubbings can be made; a large cartoon panel representing the Bolton area incorporating lift-up doors with questions and answers about pollution, and a large floor game which can be used to explain food chains and webs and also helps form a link between all the species represented in the gallery.

The Wildlife Study Centre, adjacent to the new gallery, is an informal classroom in which school furniture, which is attractive but very resilient, has been used to create an environment which is familiar to children. It contains the more highly technical, interactive areas including a sealed unit containing a video-camera with a self-focusing macro-lens which allows instant magnification onto two television screens of all sorts of objects from the natural world. These objects are available in 70 clear, perspex-lidded plastic drawers as well as specimens on open display about the room. A touch-screen computer provides details on local sites and species and is complementary to the habitats displayed in the gallery. Notice-boards and a small display case are available for local societies, voluntary groups and museum staff to display details of field meetings, wildlife surveys and other events.

Both the gallery and the study centre opened on 17 August 1994, winning the North West Museum of the Year award in June 1995 for the category "best, new, innovative display."

WILDLIFE ON YOUR DOORSTEP GALLERY – EDUCATIONAL USE.

Trish Harper, Bolton Museum.

School visits are regarded by the children as time off school, and we try to make the session as different an experience as possible. Teachers must feel that the visit has been worthwhile educationally so we try to tackle each subject in some depth, covering material that would take several lessons in a normal classroom situation.

Lessons are planned to relate closely to the gallery collections, and research in the galleries plays a key part in all lessons. Children are encouraged to be active – to go and look, to ask questions, to find a book, or to try things out for themselves.

The introductory part may be organisational information or, as in the case of 'On the Rocks', a short talk on which to build the session's activities. This is given to the whole class, and then the children are divided into smaller groups so that they can carry out a series of different activities. The activities are planned in a sequence, but the children can start at any point and complete a circuit – which means that no-one is kept waiting, everyone is busy. The concluding activity may simply be a showing of the work completed, or a reporting back session by the children.

While obviously in the natural history galleries and the aquarium we are dealing with National Curriculum Science, we find that we are covering a very important part of the English National Curriculum, that of speaking and listening. Most of the workshops and lessons are geared to Key Stage 2, this age group being the bulk of our visitors.

COPING WITH THE NUMBERS – NATURAL HISTORY DOCUMENTATION AT GUERNSEY MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

Alan Howell, Natural History Officer, Guernsey Museums.

Although the scale of our documentation 'challenge' is somewhat smaller than that of the Natural History Museum,

it does none-the-less present a challenge, given the resources which are available. Any situation is a product of history and a short resume of the museum story in Guernsey will help to clarify this. The Museum's natural history holdings (estimated at 35,000 items) essentially come from two Victorian collections:

1. *The Lukis Collection* – amassed by members of the local Lukis family during the nineteenth century and bequeathed to the States [government] of Guernsey in 1907. The material includes geology and conchology. A contemporary manuscript mineral catalogue lists 901 items and some of the 5000 or so specimens bear numbers relating to this – some others have data labels. The shells are mostly without data but include the first living *Triton* specimens recorded from British waters – a matter of some controversy at the time.

2. *The Guille-Alles Collection* – the contents of the Guille-Alles Museum, founded in 1885 (but incorporating older material) and deposited on long loan to the Guernsey Museum & Galleries service in 1978. The Guille-Alles Museum had strong support from the local natural history society and amassed considerable natural science holdings in most of the traditional areas of collecting. It includes the insect collection of William Luff – estimated at 20,000 specimens in 1910. The only documentation for the collection as a whole consisted of display labels and an inventory made by contracted (non-specialist) labour just before the museum was packed for transfer to Guernsey Museum's main storage premises. The Guille-Alles Museum had been run by a succession of honorary curators, with no permanent full-time staff. Guernsey only appointed a full-time and professionally trained curator in 1972 (despite having been responsible for the Lukis Collection since 1907) and the modern States administered service has developed since that date. The first natural history specialist was appointed in 1986, bringing the curatorial complement to three. With the other behind-the-scenes staff (Director, education officer, three general technicians and two administrative staff) the service supports eight museums at three sites. There is no separate registrar or documentation specialist, although experience has shown, and continues to demonstrate, that this would be desirable.

Given the poor state of documentation relating to the natural history collections in 1986, improvement of this was seen as something of a priority for the newly appointed Natural History Officer. The task was part of the overall need to assess and curate these two Victorian collections. The physical curation of the collections was largely deferred, pending removal to a new storage facility. Although the scheme to provide this facility (as a separate entity) has latterly been shelved in favour of a revised service-wide storage solution, the situation did provide an environment where some concerted effort was possible on the documentation of the collection.

From the outset it was decided to computerise the data, and in effect the natural history collections provided the pilot for the introduction of computers into the service generally. The MDA's MODES software was the chosen route, although the service did not have a history of using the manual MDA system, having used typed, loose-leaf accession sheets, with duplicate series arranged by subject and storage location. The production of these typed sheets had not progressed to include any of the older natural history material, so it was doubly appropriate to commence the computerisation effort in this area. The approach has been to