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The Biology Curator

Title: LEEDS CITY MUSEUM - its Natural History Collections: Part 3 The Botanical Collections

Author(s): Norris, A.

Source: Norris, A. (1997). LEEDS CITY MUSEUM - its Natural History Collections: Part 3 The Botanical Collections. *The Biology Curator*, 9, 5 - 8.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/476>

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LEEDS CITY MUSEUM - its Natural History Collections

Part 3 The Botanical Collections

Adrian Norris

Assistant Curator Natural History, Leeds City Museums,
Calverly St., LS1 3AA

ABSTRACT

This paper covering the botanical collections held at the Leeds City Museum, is the third in a series of papers on the museums natural history collections, (Norris, 1993 & 1995). Although the Leeds City Museum has had a long tradition in the fields of Zoology, Entomology and Malacology, its collecting tradition in the field of Botany, and related subjects, was far less active. Some material entered the museum in the early years but by far the bulk of the botanical collections are of much more recent origin.

COLLECTIONS - LOST AND FOUND

The museum holds a number of very early botanical collections some dating back over 200 years, and yet very little of the pre-war collections seem to have survived. The collections of John Atkinson, F.J.S.Foljambe (MP), Miss Purvis, Prof Rutherford and F.H.Woods all appear to have been lost. The loss of these collections seems to have been as a result of the aftermath of the bombing of the museum in March 1941. All the evidence suggests that the botanical collections were removed from the damaged building and placed in an outlying store. Some of this material eventually found its way to a cupboard at Farnley Hall, Old Farnley, Leeds which became the museums main outstore. The hall, now the headquarters of the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council, was at that period unheated, damp, the roof leaked and it was generally in a very poor condition. The inevitable happened, and the roof sprung a leak directly above the cupboard. When this was eventually noticed, as far as we can tell several years later, it was too late to salvage the collections. A lesson in not storing vulnerable material in places which are rarely visited by curatorial staff. Not all the botanical collections however, found their way into this cupboard as subsequent events proved.

In the late 1950s Miss Kit Robb, one of Yorkshire's leading botanists at the time, undertook to work on what remained of the museums collections. Miss Robb did very little delving into the museums records, and the Keeper of Biology, Mr John Armitage had little interest in the subject, and even less time or inclination to look into the records. This resulted in collections being mis-attributed, causing ongoing problems for all concerned. The project behind Kit Robb's task was to check the identification of the plants and amalgamate the collections into one. This she did using the Flora of the British Isles by Clapham, Tutin and Warburg (1952), as the order in which to store the collection. The amalgamation of collections without first listing, or marking them, resulted in several small collections vanishing. Recent investigations into the collection has identified specific collections of material in which it is now no longer possible to identify how the collection entered the museum, for example; a small collection of plants by William West must

have entered the museum as part of some other collection, this cannot now be identified specifically, although it probably came in as part of the William Kirby Collection in 1917/18.

The main problem resulting from the mis-attribution of the collections relate to the entries in British Herbaria (Kent, 1957), This publication lists Leeds Museum as housing the collections of R.B.Jowitt, J.F.Pickard, J.Woods and an unknown collector. Of these four entries only that for R.B.Jowitt appears to be correct. We have now been able to identify some 587 sheets as belonging to the collection of F.R.Benson-Jowitt. J.Woods appears to refer to the collection of the Rev. William Wood (1745-1808), however the labels on the boxes in Kit Robbs, handwriting suggests that she attributed this collection to (? Dr Smith), another slight confusion to the story. The reference to the collection of J.F.Pickard is a total mystery.

BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS

The Leeds City Museum's botanical collections number in excess of 55,000 specimens, divided up as follows: 35,000 vascular plants; 4,000 mosses and liverworts; 7,000 lichens; 8,000 fungi and over 1,000 miscellaneous items such as microscope slides and marine algae. The museum also holds a large number of photographic slides of flowering plants and fungi.

Vascular Plants

In recent years the vascular plant collections have been rehoused in new acid-free solander type boxes. These boxes were designed by the author and built by Westwinds to the highest standard, and are available from them under the name "Norris Royal Special" Solander Boxes. The process of rehousing the collection was an expensive exercise which could only have been undertaken with the help of grants from the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council. All the British material rehoused in these boxes have also been indexed onto M.D.A. record cards, and in many cases collection catalogues produced.

The botanical collections in general contain some very early material, often mounted on hand made paper, unfortunately much of this early material has no information with the specimens.

Several members of the Leeds Naturalists' Club and Scientific Association worked on the flora of the Leeds district and built up botanical collections as a direct result of these surveys. Several of these collections have been donated to the museum with the result that we have material from some parts of the city going back to the time of the Rev. William Wood some 300 years past, and in some cases the plants have been collected many times over from the same sites.

The number of individual collections held in Leeds City Museum are far too many to be able to discuss every one fully. I have, therefore, selected a few of the more interesting collections as examples.

Rev. William Wood (1745-1808)

The Rev. William Wood (1745-1808), was a nonconformist minister who on the 30th of May 1773 succeeded Joseph Priestley at the Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds a post he held till his death in 1808. A keen botanist he built and maintained a botanical collection which remained in the Wood's family until 1948. Miss D. Wood a great great granddaughter of Rev Wood wrote to the Linnean Society in 1948 offering the collection to them. It seems that the collection had been passed on to his son on his death in 1808 and had remained in the same house in Yorkshire until just prior to the 2nd war when it was transferred to Miss Wood's home in Dorking. The collection was in the Linnean Society Rooms being examined when a botanist, with Leeds connections, saw the collection, and stated that it should go to the Leeds City Museum, which in due course it did.

Originally bound in volumes, these were dismantled by Kit Robb and part of the collection, mainly material with locality data, was incorporated into the main collection, a fact that has only just come to light. In the mid 1980s Nigel Hepper of the Royal Botanic Gardens Herbarium at Kew did some work on this collection, and it was thought at that time that none of the material had been incorporated into the general herbarium. This resulted in some 37 plants being omitted, mostly ferns and their allies, from his paper, 'William Wood — an eighteenth-century Leeds botanist' (Hepper, 1988).

James Abbott (1831-1889)

The first survey of the Leeds area was undertaken by James Abbott. Educated at Leeds Grammar School, he served as an apprentice to a Leeds Pharmacist. He then went to London to work for Corbyn, Story and Co., Chemists in High Holborn, returning to Leeds in the late 1850s to set up his own business. He thus opened a chemists shop at 145, Woodhouse Lane in Leeds. He studied botany under Prof. Huxley at South Kensington, and later took on an important role in the teaching of natural history, and later acted as a demonstrator in biology at the Yorkshire College (latterly Leeds University), under Prof. Miall. In 1872 he presented a manuscript list of 400 plants which he had recorded from the Adel and Meanwood Valley area of Leeds to the Leeds Naturalists' Club. After he died in 1889 his collection was taken over by the society and eventually passed over to the care of Leeds City Museum in 1976.

Thomas Cockerline (1891-1979)

Born in Leeds he was the son of a wheelwright, his father having moved to Leeds from Roos a small village a few miles from Withernsea in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Thomas developed an early interest in natural history and botany in particular as a result of spending several of his school holidays with his grand-parents in the village of Roos. He started collecting and pressing plants at an early age and kept up this interest throughout his life. Most of his working life he spent in clerical jobs, but he was a very keen gardener and on his retirement he took a job as a gardener with a brewery, tending gardens at their public houses. He married Hilda Cecilia Brooks in 1924, but did not raise a family, Cissie died in 1956. His extensive botanical

collections were left to the Leeds City Museums in his last will and testament.

Dr George Arthur Nelson (1903-1989)

Born in Pocklington in East Yorkshire, he obtained a scholarship to Durham Cathedral Choir School in 1911. In 1917 he left the Choir and completed his education at Pocklington High School. He served as an apprentice with a Pocklington Chemist before coming to Leeds to study at the Yorkshire College of Pharmacy, graduating in 1924. In 1933 he is recorded as having set up in business as a chemist at No.1, Caledonian Road, Leeds. In 1946 he joined the Leeds University staff as a lecturer in Pharmacy and Pharmacology [part-time], becoming a full time member of staff in 1950 after he sold his shop. One of his main interests as a botanist was poisonous plants and how the toxins affected people and animals, he published several papers on this subject and undertook forensic work on behalf of the local hospitals and the police. He always claimed that his botanical collection was an accident. The bulk of the collection came into being as a result of his interest in botanical painting. He was a recorder for the Leeds Naturalists' Club for many years. His collection came to the Leeds City Museums soon after his death in 1989.

Ernest Charles Horrell (d.c.1943)

This extensive collection of flowering plants was originally left by Horrell to Dr W.A.Sledge who subsequently deposited the collection with Leeds University. The collection was transferred into the care of the Leeds City Museums from Leeds University by G.A.Shaw and Prof. Woolhouse in 1977, with the permission of Dr Sledge. The collection is well known for the large number of alien plants it contains.

Henry Ibbotson (1814-1886)

Henry was born at Ganthorpe a small village near Castle Howard the son of John and Elizabeth Ibbotson. He developed an early interest in botany, and spent much of his youth in the company of Richard Spruce exploring the countryside around Castle Howard. Richard Spruce an eminent botanist was born in the same village in 1817. Henry became a school teacher with appointments at Mowthorpe, Dunnington and Grimthorpe. He travelled widely with Richard Spruce throughout Britain in search of plants prior to Richard leaving to collect in South America in 1849. In latter years he earned his living by collecting plants for druggists, but fell on hard times, often being unable to pay his rent. His address in York, 2 Grape Lane was known as a poor area of immigrants and had a bad reputation. He died after a short illness on the 12th of February 1886

William Kirby (1821-1919)

Born in Leeds William was the son of William and Ann Kirby. Of poor working class and little education little is known of his life but he is recorded as being the caretaker at the Leeds School Board Offices in Great George Street, Leeds. His interest in botany was long standing and he built up a large collection of pressed plants. He corresponded with many local botanists including Henry Ibbotson. His

collection was purchased by the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society for their Museum. William died in his home at 6, Cliff Mount, Delph Lane, Woodhouse, Leeds on the 13th of January 1919.

Kenneth Geoffrey Payne (1917-)

Born in Cheam the eldest of three brothers, he was educated at Caterham School, and the Royal College of Science, graduated aged 19 with an Honours B.Sc. in Physics. After graduating he moved to York to work for a firm of Optical Instrument Makers, and remained there until he retired. He is well known as an entomologist and mycologist as well as a botanist. His extensive collection includes material from many parts of Europe, in particular several of the Mediterranean Islands.

John Grimshaw Wilkinson (1856-1937)

John Wilkinson was born in Wortley near Leeds, and was a staunch baptist. He was involved in the grocery retail trade until he became blind in 1877. Fortunately he was sufficiently well off not to have to worry about how he could earn a livelihood. His second cousin, the painter Atkinson Grimshaw, also helped to enable him to take up the study of botany. He used his lips and tongue as well as smell and touch to identify firstly trees and later most other plants. His expertise became so widely acknowledged that Leeds University honoured him with the honorary degree of Master of Science in 1915.

This collection contains many rare and extinct garden plants and varieties, mainly collected from private and public gardens in the Yorkshire area. His collection was transferred into the care of Leeds City Museum in 1982.

Bankfield Museum Batley (Calderdale Museums Service)

In 1990 the Natural History Department of Calderdale Museum Service was closed and the collections transferred to Leeds. This included a number of small but important collections most of which had originated from the Hebdon Bridge Literary and Scientific Society in 1973. Material in this transfer includes specimens from Joseph Needham and William Sutcliffe amongst others. See section on Bryophytes for details of Needham and Sutcliffe.

Other Major Collections not listed above

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Bryological collections

The main part of the Bryological collections arrived in Leeds as part of the transfer of material from the Bankfield Museum in Calderdale to 1990. Prior to this the Leeds City Museum held very little material, and the little it did hold, mostly post dated 1960. The material transferred from Calderdale included the collections of James Needham (1849-1913), Harold Walsh and William Sutcliffe. Most of the collection needs its identification checked, and then repacking and rehousing to bring it up to an acceptable modern standard. Only one of these three main collections

have been examined in recent years, that of William Sutcliffe of Heptonstall, (Blockeel, 1980), when the nomenclature was checked and brought up to date. A recent addition to the collections is the collection of Fred Branson.

Mycological collections

The mycological collections are a recent addition to the museums holdings. Started in the mid 1970s by Dr Charles J. La Touche as part of the Meanwood Valley Survey, a major linear park in Leeds. The collection has been added to by some of the counties most outstanding mycologists, not least of which is the present recorder Chris Yeates. The collection has had several boosts over the years, which have added to its status and resulted in even further donations. Perhaps the most important of these were the collections from Calderdale. Bankfield Museum had the beginnings of a substantial mycological collection containing some 577 specimens. This collection was put together by Peter Earland-Bennet and Paul Stewart, and the material was intimately linked to the lichen collections in that the status of some 'lichens' is still open to debate.

The decision by Dr T.F.(Tom) Preece to donate his collection of rusts to the museum on completing his Atlas of Rust Fungi (Preece & Hick, 1990), also helped bring in material, not the least of which is the collection of micro-fungi associated with plants donated by Mr K.G. Payne. This collection contains nearly one thousand samples, every one of which has been described in detail on notes contained with the packets.

The publication of a paper by the author 'Being of Sound Mind' (Norris, 1987), on what to do, or not do, when leaving your collection to a museum, or similar institute also produced dividends. In 1989 the author was contacted by the widow of the late Mr Anthony Joseph Moore of Wakefield, who had read the paper which was amongst the documents left behind by her late husband. Amongst the mycological material collected by the late Mr Moore was a long series of specimens part of Kalman Vankey's *Ustilaginales Exciccata*. With the help of Kalman Vankey we were able to complete this exciccata and we also acquired with the aid of a Science Museum (PRISM) fund grant several other part or complete exciccata. This collection includes material from Liro, J.I., *Mycotheca Fennica* (900 samples); Rabenhorst, L., *Fungi europaei* (400 samples); Romell, L., *Fungi exsiccati praesertim scandinavici* (200 samples); Briosi, G., & Cavara, F., *funghi parassiti* (475 samples) and Eriksson, J., *Fungi parasitici Scandinavici* (50 samples) plus many several hundred other samples. These collections have helped to give the collection an historical base.

We have also recently acquired, but as yet still not sorted, a quantity of material collected by Mr Willis Bramley (1897-1992), the county recorder for Yorkshire. The result of all this activity is that the fungi collections are now well established and have good local and international elements to the collection, which we hope to be able to develop over the coming years.

The Lichen Collections

The transfer of the lichen collection from the Bankfield Museum in Halifax to Leeds nearly quadrupled the size of

the Leeds City Museums lichen collection. The bulk of the collection was the work of Peter Earland-Bennett with the help of Paul Stewart his assistant. The vast majority of specimens within the collection were identified and carded to M.D.A. standard. However, many thousands of specimens are still awaiting packaging and identification. The Isle of Man material which remained unidentified has been loaned back to Peter Earland-Bennett to enable him to complete his work on this material for a lichen flora of the Isle of Man. It is hoped that the other unidentified material will be worked on in the near future. In 1990 we also acquired a collection of 300 specimens in the form of an exciccata from Alan Fryday.

The lichen collections although mainly from British locations, also includes overseas material. Samples included within the collections come from as far afield as Hong Kong. Much of the identification of the overseas material, and a good deal of the British, has been undertaken by Mr Albert Henderson of Leeds University. Without who's help and encouragement, we would not have been able to cope with the collection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who have helped and advised in the production of this paper. In particular I would like to thank my wife Barbara for reading and commenting on the manuscript and Miss Helen James who undertook much of the background research on my behalf.

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Institute of Anatomical Science

Museum Specimen 'Rescue' Scheme — Update

At the 1992 Annual General Meeting concern was expressed about the state of Pathology Museums in the UK. It was reported that in some parts of the country as many as 70% of the museums faced closure with the resultant destruction of the collections and the loss of many potentially good teaching specimens that could be used by other establishments. Many of the museums were founded in earlier centuries; indeed some of the specimens were considered to be irreplaceable.

The meeting proposed that the treasurer should write on behalf of the institute to every Pathology Museum in the country to enquire if they intend to dispose of all or part of their collection, and if so to ask if they would be prepared to notify him. He arranged to have any available specimens (with or without documentation) collected and brought to a distribution centre in Nottingham where they could be assessed, renovated and catalogued. A list of available material would then be sent to all Medical Schools who had expressed interest and the specimens given free of charge to any bona fide Pathology or Anatomy museum to fill gaps in their own collections. In this way it was hoped that we could preserve many of the older specimens, often showing pathology that is rarely seen today, while helping those schools who still use such museum pots in their teaching.

When we commenced the "rescue scheme" it became clear that this would be a major undertaking. We considered this work to be very important and the treasurer wrote to the Wellcome Trust to see if we could gain funding to assist in running the scheme and they generously awarded a grant of over £42,500 to cover the cost of consumables for three years and the salary for a technician to be employed on the renovation of all specimens. During the period of the grant over 4,000 specimens were received which was in line with our prediction. Specimens have been received from all over the UK and the numbers of donated specimens ranged from three specimens from the Royal Air Force Forensic Museum to over 1,000 from University College Hospital Medical School. Of all the specimens received only two were judged to be beyond restoration. Most specimens arrived without any documentation and meetings were arranged where pathologists met to put macro diagnoses to them. When the specimens had been renovated they were dispatched via a carrier to bona fide establishments who had expressed interest in receiving them. In the original proposal it was expected that these would be established museums, and although several museums have been recipients much of the available material has gone to form the nucleus of five entirely new teaching museums for use by both undergraduate and post graduate students.

All of these museums will continue to receive specimens as suitable material becomes available. In the last three years we have also been able to help organisations such as Oxford University to restore their pathology museum which had suffered through lack of experienced qualified staff. Specimens continue to be donated and the rescue scheme is judged to have been such a success that we are continuing