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When the Ulster Museum achieved National status Botany and Zoology were part of the then "Department of Natural Sciences", which also included Geology. The Keeper C. Douglas Deane was also Deputy Director of the museum and the staff consisted of an Assistant Keeper in each of Geology and Zoology, a Research Assistant in Botany, a Field Officer/Senior Taxidermist and a trainee Taxidermist.

In April 1970 a separate department of Geology was erected under the Keepership of P.S. Doughty, Botany and Zoology remaining part of the responsibility of the Deputy Director. On the retirement of C.D. Deane in 1977 D.G. Erwin was appointed to the first full Keepership of the department without other responsibilities.

A major and protracted stocktaking and reexamination of direction and policy took place over the next year culminating in the production of statements of collecting policy, research policy and loans policy, together with significant reorganisation of departmental structure and working.

The collecting policy drawn-up then, (1978) is reproduced below.

Collecting Policy

(i) Irish material

This will take priority over all other material in terms of collecting effort, storage and finance. Whenever relevant and fully documented Irish material becomes available we shall attempt to obtain it for the collections.

(ii) British material

This will take secondary position only to Irish material and except where another museum has prior claim will be acquired whenever possible.

(iii) Relevant European or north-east Atlantic material

Comparative specimens of Irish species from other parts of their range, or species not found in Ireland but which are relevant to the study of the Irish fauna or flora, will be collected.

(iv) Material from further afield

Material of direct relevance to existing collections or material for display purposes will be acquired.

(v) Other material

Exceptionally a single specimen or a collection of great scientific interest or importance may become available which will not fall within the above guidelines. Sufficient flexibility must be available to encompass such an occurrence.

Although material collected is primarily preserved or unpreserved biological material of various kinds, ancillary material such as photographs, tape recordings, documents etc. will also be collected.

cover the cost of travel to any meeting, conference or consultation in England Scotland or Wales. It is thus obvious why it has been remarked about some of us that "We are conspicuous by our absence". Within the budget available it has become essential that we balance out every priority. An attendance at a conference by one member of staff means that another cannot have that piece of equipment that is "absolutely essential". We can only hope and trust that in the near future our budget will be restored to a realistic level and that we shall again be able to make fuller contribution to the various organisations to which many of us are committed.

Office, lab. and storage space has been a running sore to the Department for some years. At present some of the department is housed with the Geology department, some in "temporary" accommodation in offices without windows in the garage area. The Botany offices and labs are currently housed in a rented private house "across the road" from the main museum building. It is hoped that most of our problems in this direction will be solved in the very near future as the Zoology sections move onto a new mezzanine area in the "old" part of the building where the ceilings were high enough to permit such development.

The main storage area at present is shared by Geology and Antiquities. Although this may have seemed a logical step when the building was being designed it has led to many problems. Different climatic conditions are obviously required for different types of material. This is impossible to achieve. Security in terms of access to the collections is not under the direct control of departmental staff and for much of the time there are a number of people working in the store, not on Botany and Zoology material. This has the added problem of making pest control difficult. By the nature of the structure of the store and because of some of the other material in it, which could be affected, and for "Health and Safety" reasons it has not been possible to carry out methyl bromide fumigation. Neither, because of people working in the area, has it been possible to use residual insecticides. Thus our collections are at present unprotected from pest attack. Vigilance on the part of staff members is our only defence.

THE FUTURE

The Department has passed through a fairly traumatic period of self-examination. We now, for the first time, know where we are going. We see no reason to attempt to justify our principal function of Collecting, Curating and Researching in any other terms. We do however see our brief extending beyond the walls of the Museum. If we are to "preserve the National Heritage" in biological terms, the collections which are our prime responsibility are really only vouchers for that "Heritage". The REAL heritage is represented by the natural environment and the animals and plants which inhabit it. To preserve this natural environment thus, must also be one of our principal aims, and to achieve this we must be involved in "Conservation" work of all sorts in addition to our "basic" Museum work.

In conjunction with Conservation Branch of the Department of the Environment (N.I.) (the body which fulfils the role of the N.C.C. in N.I.) we hope to enlarge our information and specimen base. Survey work with voucher material being deposited in the Ulster Museum together with a "data bank" of site and species information should enable us to occupy our full role in the Northern Ireland community. These developments have been approved in principal, and some have been instituted in "pilot"

form. They simply await the availability of finance and staffing to institute them in their final form. (Developments on these lines may occur in the near future; a further report will be produced outlining the details if and when there is positive movement.)

David G. Erwin

MUSEUM.

In order to afford the Working classes every facility for seeing such a rare specimen as the

LIVING CHAMELEON,

and for inspecting the otherwise extensive and interesting collection contained in this Institution, the Curator will be in attendance on

EASTER MONDAY,

From 9 in the morning till 6 in the afternoon.

Ordinary Admission Fee, - - - 6d.

Mechanics & Operatives, (on this occasion only,) 2d.

Children (if accompanied by their Parents,) Half Price.

Robert F. Ward, Printer, 25, Waring-Street, Belfast.

Poster issued in 1845 as part of an advertising campaign for the Museum of the Belfast Natural History And Philosophical Society.