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should be included if at all possible but again, this depends on members sending them in.

Finally, I have enjoyed the last four year's (and it don't seem a day too much!) editorial duties very much thanks to those of you who helped to make the editors life easy (comparatively!). Particular thanks must go to Bill Pettitt who has edited the more academic papers on behalf of the Group since the days of the *Journal of Biological Curation* and Kathie Way who completed the often thankless but essential task of producing an index to the last volumes of *BCG Newsletter*. Northern Whig, our printers in Belfast, have also greatly contributed to easing the production of each issue with an efficient and, above all, friendly service - thanks George.

So, the very best of luck to the new editorial team at Bolton and to all of you real workers out there so long and thanks for all the fish!

*Mike Taylor, Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Scotland*

## DOCUMENTATION CELL REPORT

I am pleased to be taking on the role of "nucleus" of the Documentation Cell. Documentation is something that all curators, regardless of their subject speciality, have to be aware of; some even do it. Many aspects are universal, but some are unique to the life sciences. There are a number of initiatives underway that are looking at the specific documentation needs of different types of collections. My aim is to ensure that BCG, and therefore its membership, can contribute to and benefit from these initiatives, and take on other projects of value to natural science curators.

Over the next year the Documentation Cell will look at three projects:

- defining the core information that is needed to describe and manage natural sciences collections
- clarification of conditions on entry forms specific to natural science material, particularly in respect of existing legislation
- developing guidelines on the documentation of natural sciences collections for MGC Registration.

It is important that the end results are relevant and usable. So it is essential that as many people as possible contribute to the process. All volunteers to help with the Documentation Cell are welcome. The work will not be arduous: it may involve as little as a few phone calls. Please contact me, if you would like to help.

The results of the cell's work will be published in *The Biology Curator*, when there is something to say, and reported at next year's AGM.

Thank you.  
Nick Goff

## A Natural Sciences Touring Exhibitions Network:

### A discussion document.

This proposal began as an idea based on a number of factors. A number of institutions already design exhibitions for touring, but they tend to suffer from the problem that they are too big and/or too expensive for places such as Scunthorpe Museum, with the severely limited budgets and temporary exhibition space. Our need is for exhibitions that have immediate appeal (and should therefore be quite glossily presented), cost only a few hundred pounds at most, and take up no more than 100 square metres. These requirements would seem to be mutually contradictory, and it must be remembered that many small museums are able to take only exhibitions that are effectively free and occupy only a few square metres.

Although there is a touring exhibitions group, I see no reason why a network dedicated to natural history should not be feasible, indeed desirable, given that there is a conspicuous lack of small travelling natural history exhibitions. It may be easier to run such a group independently rather than as part of a wider touring exhibitions group.

The suggestion is that a group of around a dozen museums, from all over the country, preferably at least one from each region would contribute both a representative and money, say between £100 and £500, to such a network, generating several thousand pounds for the project. This could then be used to generate further funding. The groups purpose would be solely to generate one travelling exhibition each year, on a topic to be decided by the committee, to tour five or six museums per year for two to three years, or as seems most appropriate. Features of design would include immediate and marketable appeal, ease of transport and ability to scale the exhibition up or down to fit venues of varying sizes. Two useful suggestions have been made in the course of informal discussions about this idea. Firstly, after design, the 2-D parts of the exhibition be produced by the group, with the 3-D material, such as mounted specimens, be taken from the host museums collections or borrowed from a nearby service. This would make it much easier to transport, as well as promoting the use of more collections and cooperation among neighbouring services. The second idea is that both a small and a larger version of the exhibitions be produced, allowing it to travel more quickly and be more adaptable to different display areas.

It is suggested that the museums within the network take it in turns to act as the coordinating centre for the design, production an use of an exhibition. This will spread the workload, and also the benefits, both locally and nationally, of being seen to be an active participant in the scheme.

Another suggestion is that to keep costs down, the group could consider the use of college design departments in creating exhibitions, something recently done successfully at Scunthorpe. Such departments would jump at the chance of significant projects such as this for post-A level students, whose output is regularly of an very high standard. Furthermore, contacts with such institutions can be very

useful, again especially to smaller museums, both in terms of the direct benefits to the museum and the marketability of collaboration with outside organisations. With experience for designers trying to get started in their careers being very difficult to get, museums could also be seen to be promoting careers outside of their own profession, as well as, of course, promoting the cause of museum design and a greater range of exhibitions.

The use of Area Museums Council grants could be very useful. The question of which council would be approached needs to be addressed, but in the long term this could possibly be done in rotation, and according to which museum is acting as the coordinating centre. It might be expected that the AMC's would not be concerned with such matters as the design of the exhibitions or the running of the scheme, except insofar as it relates to the requirements for grant approval.

It is appreciated that there are many problems that would need to be overcome. How to get a satisfactory consensus over what is to be produced? How will the rota be decided? What about the institutions at the back of the queue? What kind of work will actually be required? Who will organise and run the scheme as a whole? These are not going to be easily answered. Any organisation that undertakes to set this up will need to be confident of continued support from participating institutions. It will not be a matter of paying out a certain amount of money and waiting for the exhibition to arrive.

This proposal has been written up for discussion purposes. If you are interested please contact Steve Thompson at Scunthorpe Museum, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, DN15 7BD. 01724 843533.

### IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS AT IPSWICH MUSEUM

#### *Natural Science Collections in South East Britain*

Bateman, J., McKenna, G. and Timberlake, S., was published in 1993, the result of the long-running South East Collections Research Project. The register was produced initially as a computer database which would have restricted its sale to those with suitable computer facilities. The printed version consists of a catalogue and the database indices.

There are a number of problems which make this hard copy version difficult to use. The main catalogue is a list of collections ordered by collectors name. Highlighting the subject and locality would help readers pick out relevant entries. Many researchers would surely be more interested in a specific geographical area or a subject rather than a personal name?

The indices refer back to the main catalogue entries, again, making it time consuming to find information because entries are so scattered. This process is made even more difficult because there are no page numbers in the entire volume!

Little editing has been carried out on the indices and there are numerous duplications. On the first page of the geographical index, for example, University College London appears fifteen times. This index is hard to use, as again there are no divisions by subject, just a collection name without added information.

The confusing nature of the publication hides some more fundamental problems, missing entries and other errors. The Ogilvie collection of mounted British birds, one of the finest in the country is placed at Luton rather than at Ipswich Museum. The number of collections listed for Ipswich Museum is quite small. This does not reflect the size or range of the collections at Ipswich Museum, rather the collection details were not entered onto the database. Over twenty named geology collections do not appear in the register including the Bell and Canham collections containing Red Crag material and the Spencer collection of Pleistocene mammals. Examples of the many other collections missing from the register include the Morley collection of coleoptera, the Pierce and Singleton-Smith collections of lepidoptera, the Burton, Tuck and Packard collections of bird eggs and the Ransome collection of mounted birds.

At the time of the original research unit project (1981-85) data was processed at Manchester and entered on the database there. Record forms with details of Ipswich Museum collections were sent to Manchester during this period after which they were never heard of again. It was assumed that this early information was stored on the Manchester database and subsequently transferred to the current SECRU database held at the MDA. It was only after the data collection and processing stages of the latest SECRU survey that it was discovered that some Ipswich records had not been entered in to the Manchester and then the SECRU databases. Unfortunately, by the time the problem emerged, the SECRU register was already in production and it was too late to add the missing entries to the current edition. Ipswich Museum data in the register is therefore extremely incomplete. As these records contain numerous county collections, Suffolk is badly under-represented in the register.

If anyone is interested in the true extent of Suffolk collections or would like further information about the natural science collections held at Ipswich then please contact the Natural Sciences Section (tel 0473 213761).

*David J. Lampard, Keeper of Natural Sciences, Ipswich Museum, High Street, Ipswich, IP1 3QH*

[Many of the collections registers produced by the CRUs have deficiencies. In Scotland for example the important collections at Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow are poorly represented. This is simply a fact of life and one tends to forget the appalling state of knowledge of our scientific heritage before the CRUs got to work and before Manchester Museum generously coordinated the processing of data. The technology now widely available should deal with the problems of access to data and indexing. The MDA now hold the 'National' copy of all CRU data and this is apparently very easy to update now that all the data is in the MODES format. A future issue of *Biology Curator* will contain a summary of the current state of the CRUs. - Ed M.T.]