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Title: If you want to know more about the Natural Science Collections at Ipswich Museum

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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 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 into 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).

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[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.]