



DROPPINGS
FROM THE
GEOLOGICAL
CURATORS
GROUP

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Chairman's Report

In a three-year term of office I think that one could be excused for thinking that once the first year has passed, and the controls of the locomotive understood, that the wheels of office would roll smoothly until you entered the terminus at the end of year three. Certainly this has not been the case this year; it has been marked by some great difficulties, but these have been offset somewhat by achievements which you will hear of from other members of the committee.

BCG and NSCG have now merged as NatSCA, and we remain in close contact with this group through Steve Thompson who remains on the GCG committee. At an early part in the merger discussions the GCG were approached about joining a merged group. However it was decided that we should remain independent. I wrote to NatSCA soon after its establishment offering my congratulations and hopes that it and the GCG would work together and forge links where appropriate. I am looking forward to their AGM to be held in Dublin next April.

The Manchester Museum has undergone staff restructuring. Most of you will know much about this business as the rationale for this was outlined by Tristram Besterman (the Director of the museum) in the June issue of *Coprolite* and I responded in the same issue on behalf of the Group. I know that many were deeply unhappy about the proposed changes and that letters of representation were sent to Manchester. The Group wrote and outlined its concerns on the effects these changes would have on the welfare of the collections. Nevertheless, in April restructuring went ahead and the Keeper of Geology, John Nudds (a former Chairman of our Group) was allowed to leave; he has been redeployed in the Department of Earth Sciences in Manchester, and the Keeper of Mineralogy, David Green has been downgraded to Curator level. Since this time a new Curator of Palaeontology has been appointed. Last year I wondered how the collections would be affected by this move, and already I hear that important archival material has been lost and museum fittings discarded. I repeat what I voiced last year: if the important collections at a designated University museum can be compromised what hope is there for other more vulnerable collections? We must be vigilant as a Group.

I continue to receive notifications of problems with collections, be they orphan collections or collections held in 'reputable' institutions. In the last few weeks I have heard mutterings of problems in this respect at Greenwich and Reading, and, as mentioned above, at Manchester. I shall write to the appropriate authorities to express our deep concern. We have also been engaged in discussion with authorities in the south-west and hope that this situation will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

It was hoped that a short statement of the Group's position on the knotty issue of ethics would have been published by now in *The Geological Curator* and in *Coprolite*. However this has not happened, as the Working Group which was set up dissolved with the resignation from Committee of Susan Cooke who was the main author of the document. This will be addressed by the Committee at its next meeting, and a new Working Group will be charged with completing the document ready for publication next summer. It is essential that we complete this as other groups such as the Museums Association are interested in our conclusions.

Earlier this year Susan Cooke resigned as Treasurer, and I thank her for her contribution in this role. At a meeting in Cardiff several members of the Committee sorted through a backlog of papers from the Treasurer, and divided up the task of sorting out several outstanding issues. Tom, Giles and myself met in October in London to discuss this business further and the situation has now been fully sorted out. Tom Sharpe took on the accounts and has done a wonderful job in order to be able to present the accounts for this year but also for last year at this AGM. I sorted through membership papers, have invoiced all institutional members for 2004, and sorted out problems with non-payment or non-encashment of cheques. I am grateful, pleased and relieved that Ros Gourgey has agreed to act as Membership Secretary for 2004 and that the whole membership database will be held by Camilla Nichol. In the past various people were responsible for different parts of this database and this was a nightmare. When you are returning your subscriptions,

your standing order form or your Gift Aid form for 2004 you should return them to Ros.

Your committee works very hard on your behalf. Giles Miller is an efficient and skilled Secretary. Steve McLean continues to exercise his imagination to provide us with an excellent series of events. As ever Ros Gourgey provided her invaluable organisational skills for the annual study visit. Tom Sharpe continues to produce *Coprolite* which seems to grow with age. Tony Morgan plays a pivotal role as Minutes Secretary. Helen Fothergill is new to her role as Recorder but already has compiled the preliminary results of the Status survey undertaken by her predecessor Glenys Wass. Helen's report appeared in the November issue of *Coprolite*. I also appreciate the valuable contributions of the other members of the Committee: Sara Chambers, Mark Evans, Jon Radley, Camilla Nichol (who is our Web Master), John Nudds, Steve Thompson and Ros Gourgey. I am most grateful to all the members of the Committee who have worked very hard during this rather difficult year but nevertheless enjoyable one for the GCG.

So what next for the Group? Apart from the usual activities we can look forward to the forthcoming publication by the Geological Society of *Guidelines 2*. Authors have been commissioned to contribute to this worthwhile publication; although it soon became apparent that many were either too busy to contribute or were unwilling as they had retired. I received the first contribution last week, so this is promising, and will continue to hound authors for their manuscripts.

Of great concern is the matter of membership which continues to fall, and a consequence of this is that our financial state is not as healthy as it was. In the first half of 2004 I shall embark on a recruitment drive and will be writing to as many institutions and individuals as I can think of and will encourage/urge/browbeat them into joining the Group. We will also attempt to sell more back issues of our journal to increase our revenue take - at the moment a considerable amount of capital is sitting in boxes in Manchester and Dublin. All the membership can participate in this recruitment drive. If you have colleagues in the museum sector who are not members, go to them with a photocopy of the subscription forms and ask them to send a cheque to Ros. Also check to see if your institution is a subscriber - if it is not, then ensure that it joins. With a large network of members the Group will see benefits in the greater transfer of information and expertise about geological collections and their curation, and this would help protect and enhance these collections further. The GCG should be a global network, and not just have a patchy presence in Western Europe. I shall work towards the development of this global network.

The GCG was saddened to learn of the deaths of Professor Frank Hodson, formerly Professor of Geology at Southampton and a long-term member of the Group, and of Michael Eagar, formerly Keeper of Geology at the Manchester Museum and acknowledged expert on Upper Carboniferous non-marine bivalves. Both will be missed. To their families and those of all recently deceased GCG members I extend the warmest sympathy on behalf of the Group.

Patrick N. Wyse Jackson

GCG Committee 2004

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Coopted members: Steve Thompson, Museum of North Lincolnshire, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe DN15 7BD tel 01724 843533 fax 01724 270474 email Steve.Thompson@northlincs.gov.uk; Camilla Nichol, Hunterian Museum, The University, Glasgow G12 8QQ tel 0141 226 5498 fax 0141 226 5498 e-mail cnichol@cqm.co.uk (from April: Yorkshire Museum & Gardens, Museum Gardens, York YO1 7FR tel 01904 687687 fax 01904 687655 email camilla.nichol@ymt.org.uk); Ros Gourgey, 32 Durham Close, Great Bardfield, Essex CM7 4UA tel 01371 810832 email Ami_air-exel@msn.com

Subscriptions 2004

Subscriptions were due on 1 January 2004. Subscriptions remain the same as last year: £12.00 for UK Personal Members and £15.00 for Overseas Personal Members. Institutional subscriptions are £16.00 for UK institutions and £18.00 for Overseas institutional subscribers. If you have not yet paid your subscription or completed a

standing order form, please do so as soon as possible. Subscriptions unpaid by 30 April 2004 will be deemed to have lapsed. Please return the subscription form in the November 2003 issue of *Coprolite*, with your payment, or the Standing Order form, to Ros Gourgey, 32 Durham Close, Great Bardfield, Essex CM7 4UA, UK.

New members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Marco Antognini**, Museo cantonale di storia naturale, Lugano, Switzerland; **Lucy McCobb**, National Museum of Wales; **Diana Clements**, Natural History Museum.

Tony Sutcliffe

Members will be saddened to hear of the death on 25 January 2004 of Antony John Sutcliffe, formerly Curator of Fossil Mammals at the Natural History Museum, London. He was well-known for his work on Quaternary mammals, and members will be familiar with his book *On the track of Ice Age mammals*, published by the Natural History Museum in 1985.

GCG Membership List 2003

Rather than publishing our membership list in *Coprolite*, we have decided that the list will be available, on request, as a Word file, from GCG Secretary Giles Miller at the Natural History Museum. The list contains only those who have given their permission on the membership renewal form for their details to be included. If you would like a copy, please contact Giles at the address on page 1 of this *Coprolite*.

Musical curators

Phil Manning, Development Manager at Bath Museum Service since August, has been appointed Curator of Palaeontology at the Manchester Museum and took up his post at the beginning of January; **Camilla Nichol**, currently Curatorial Technician at the Hunterian Museum, has been appointed Curator of Geology at York Museums Trust and will take up her post in April.

Exhibitions 2003-2004

T. rex the killer question Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London until 3 May 2004.

Dinosaurs Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne until 9 May 2004.

Dino Birds Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast until 3 May 2004.

Dinosaur skeletons currently available

Any curators currently in the planning stages of gallery refurbishments might be interested to know that a number of original, articulated dinosaur skeletons are currently on the market at competitive prices. These include a new species of centrosaur, adult and juvenile *Einosaurus*, and a juvenile *Hypacrosaurus*. For further details, contact Dr John Nudds, Department of Earth Sciences, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK, tel + 44 161 275 7861, fax +44 161 275 3947.

Geological column – even bigger discounts!

Further to the notice in *Coprolite* 42 about the Manchester Geological Column leaflet, even better discounts than before are now being offered. The leaflet retails at £1.75 per copy, and discount to the trade (including museum shops) is 35%. A discount for other orders of over 20 copies is 15%. All enquiries should be addressed to Michael Whitworth, Shop Manager, The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL tel 0161 275 2635 email michael.whitworth@man.ac.uk

GA Magazine museum column

The Geologists' Association publishes a quarterly magazine, now in its second year, and would like to include in it a regular series on geology in museums. If you would like to write a half or full page article, with pictures, on geology in your museum, telephone Tony Iles on 0208 866 4348, or email him at tonyiles@fbks.freeserve.co.uk

Newish publications

Coastal geomorphology of Great Britain by V J May and J D Hansom, 2003. Peterborough: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Geological Conservation Review Series, xvii + 737pp. ISBN 1 86107 4840

Evolution and paleobiology of pterosaurs edited by E Buffetaut and J-M Mazin, 2003. Geological Society Special Publication No 217, 347pp. ISBN 1 86239 143 2

Northamptonshire stone by Diana S Sutherland, 2003. Wimborne: The Dovecote Press, 128pp. ISBN 1 904349 17 X, £12.95

Lower Carboniferous echinoderms of North West England by S Donovan, D N Lewis & P Crabb, 2003. This is the first of a new series of publications, *Fold-out-Fossils*, by the Palaeontological Association, £2.95/\$6.00.

Hugh Miller, a one-man play

Following the Hugh Miller bicentenary celebrations of 2002, Mike Taylor at the National Museums of Scotland brings to our attention the publication of a play about the man, *Hugh Miller, a One-man Play* by Stewart Conn was published by Diehard, Callander, £2.50 post free (ISBN 0 946230 70 6). The play was revived for the bicentenary in 2002 after its original award-winning performance at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1988. It is set on the last night of Miller's life and includes, amongst other things, his thoughts on nature.

Smith's 1815 map reproduced

BGS have published a new reproduction of William Smith famous 1815 geological map, *A delineation of the strata of England and Wales with part of Scotland; exhibiting the collieries and mines, the marshes and fen lands originally overflowed by the sea, and the Varieties of Soil according to the variations in the Substrata, illustrated by the most Descriptive Names.*

The reproduction is based on a copy of the map held in the BGS Library archives,

map no 53, which is in fifteen sections, each folded into six panels. The panels were scanned and the joins digitally removed. At its original scale of five miles to the inch, the map would have been eight feet long by six feet wide. This reproduction is published at half scale, ten miles to the inch, and is colour-matched to the original. The reproduction map is 1330 x 930mm (portrait), and is priced at £15.00 (plus p&p).

Fossil, mineral and gem shows 2004

6-7 March Brighton Racecourse, Freshfield Road, Brighton

20-21 March Kempton Park Racecourse, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex

3-4 April Cheltenham Racecourse, Prestbury Park, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

24-25 April Newark Showground, Winthorpe, Newark, Nottinghamshire

8-9 May Alexandra Palace, Wood Green, London

Contact: The Exhibition Team, PO Box 72, Maidenhead SL6 7GB tel 01628 621697, fax 01628 680702, email info@rockngem.co.uk, www.Rockngem.co.uk

Feathered dinosaurs and the origin of flight

This travelling exhibition, organised jointly by the Fossil Administration Office in Liaoning, China and the Dinosaur Museum of Blandings in Utah, opens in San Diego, California on 7 Feb 2004. It remains in the USA until Sept 2004 when it goes to the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada until Sept 2005. It is then available, by special permit from the Chinese Government, for hire in Europe from October 2005, through 2006. This is **not** the exhibition organised by the NHM - it is a bigger exhibition which includes not only the feathered dinosaurs, but also many other wonderful animals and plants from the same beds.

The exhibit is around 7,000 sq ft, and has custom boxes and individual security cases for each fossil. It has a suite of 16 life-size models (large and small) to accompany the 36 original fossils, many of which are new to science. The two sculptural centrepieces are a life size *Thereizinosaurus* dinosaur, which is 13 feet tall with a 20 foot wing span and covered with feathers, and three life size 10 foot long raptors (*Deinonychus*) shown with feathers in a diorama setting.

Fossil highlights include a long tailed pterosaur that is so well preserved as to reveal a previously unknown headcrest, complete with a colour pattern and a body covering of "proto-feathers". Several fossils of dromaeosaurs are preserved with feather impressions which demonstrates that these supposed raptor precursors of birds have not only been misinterpreted as cursorial dinosaurs, but that they are actually birds which had the ability to fly. An ancestral form of birds that lived before *Archaeopteryx* is represented by a tiny 3 inch tall hatchling unlike any dinosaur in that it was clearly arboreal. Other kinds of animals in the exhibit are associated with behavioural aspects, such as parental care, as suggested by an adult skeleton of *Oviraptor* overlying the eggs of its nest.

It promises to be a stunning show, but due to its limited release from China, it is only available to 3 venues in Europe, each for a three-month hire. Due to the high fees charged by the Chinese to release these specimens from China, the exhibition

is necessarily expensive. The organisers have reduced the hire fee for the European market to US\$250,000 for a three month hire, plus shipping costs between venues. (They will pay to ship it to the first venue). The hiring museum would naturally take 100% of gate receipts. If your institution would be interested in taking this for a 3 month period please let me know as soon as possible, with preferred dates. I have a catalogue and further information which I could send if you're genuinely interested.

Dr John Nudds, Department of Earth Sciences, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK tel + 44 161 275 7861, fax +44 161 275 3947

GCG Seminar, study visit and 30th AGM
9-10 Dec 2003 Ludlow Museum Resource Centre & Secret Hills
Visitor Centre, Craven Arms

For GCG's 30th AGM the Group made a welcome return to Ludlow with its medieval streets and the Ludlow Bone Bed (more on that later).

The focus of the meeting, held at the new Ludlow Resource Centre, was the thought-provoking question, 'Is collections research dead?' Hugh Torrens opened the seminar with a look at the problems encountered whilst researching the initiation of county-wide natural history societies in the West Midlands. These societies were very active in encouraging the development of museum collections during the 19th century but researching them has proven to be more problematic than expected. Many of the societies' old journals have been lost in the sale or disposal by universities of some of their library collections. There is a pressure in some places to dispose of collections material without even properly understanding the content and significance of that material. Attention was drawn to the 'Too much Stuff' document published recently by the Museum Directors Group. Hugh also reported his experiences of negative attitudes at some West Midlands museums towards collections researchers and to the museum role of facilitating research.

Mary Kershaw, Director of Collections at York Museum Trust, outlined how the new structures at York were aimed at putting collections at the heart of the Trust, with improved storage and documentation to make it easier to respond to research enquiries. Attention was drawn to the way that many Local Authority museums are part of leisure departments, where convincing Heads of Department of the importance of collections research isn't easy.

In the third talk of the day Andy Curren used the Natural History Museum's 'Ancient Human Occupation of Britain' project as an example of how cross-disciplinary work and modern scientific research techniques were 'breathing new life into old bones.' Integrating information from archaeology and palaeontology had improved the understanding of Pleistocene biostratigraphy, as had revisiting bone cave locations to gather further stratigraphical information, such as uranium series dates from stalagmites embedded with bones.

Patrick Wyse Jackson presented the final formal presentation of the day considering the reasons for the decline in curatorial time given to collections research, or to

curating specimens for that matter. Endless meetings? Simply no time? Is collections research just no longer 'sexy'? As part of the response to the decline Patrick recommended that every curator should read back through all the issues of Geological Curator at least once every five years, perhaps as reading in the toilet.

Given a gap in the programme, Tom Sharpe gave an entertaining slide tour of GCG's European (and American) adventures. As well as giving opportunities to see wonderful geological sites and material (*Archaeopteryx* made several appearances), the international study visits have led to much better networking among the wider geological curating community. Curators have been able to compare notes and share problems. Of course there is also the sampling of the host countries' culture and food and drink! The Copenhagen trip planned for 2003 hadn't been able to go ahead, through insufficient numbers, but hopefully more people will be able to join the study visits in future.

Those staying in Ludlow for the study visit the next day gathered for a meal at the Wheatsheaf Inn, seemingly a popular haunt of the local domino-playing fraternity. The conversation at our end of the inn naturally turned geological and Giles Miller recalled his memories of PhD research at the Ludlow Bone Bed site (actually several good outcrops) not far from the Wheatsheaf. With some arm twisting he was persuaded to lead an impromptu, near-midnight (and somewhat alcohol-fuelled) visit to the bone bed. Since when were darkness, cold and fog obstacles to hardy curators! At one point Giles lifted up a small piece of the bone bed and with profound insight said, 'Can you see, it's brown.' Seriously though, the visit was a memorable addition to the meeting itinerary, and our thanks to Giles for interpreting the site (with some dubious help from one of his NHM colleagues).

The following day we had the opportunity to have a proper look around the Ludlow Resource Centre, guided by Daniel Lockett. There was plenty of time to explore and appreciate the contents of the geology store, before visiting the social history, natural history and art stores. What a broad-minded bunch of people! The mummified cat drew particular interest! The Resource Centre includes a well-equipped conservation lab and if any external conservators are looking for space they are very welcome to contact Daniel.

On, then, seven miles north to the Secret Hills Visitor Centre at Craven Arms, built as a Millennium project. After lunch we had a look around the centre, which examines the Shropshire landscape, folklore and natural history, including a full size cast of the Condover mammoth skeleton and a 'virtual balloon ride'. For those who are wondering about what makes these hills 'secret' it seems to be simply that the rocks hide the secret to understanding the landscape. On that basis I guess that makes all hills secret. The visit was enjoyable and the mammoth interactive where you put your arm through a hole and find it is controlling a mammoth's trunk can't fail to raise a smile.

Our thanks to Daniel for organising a very useful, thought provoking and enjoyable seminar and study visit.

Dale Johnston, Banbury Museum

Forthcoming GCG seminars and workshops

17–18 May 2004 North Lincolnshire Museum, Scunthorpe GCG 30th Anniversary Seminar and Field Trip: Is Collecting Dead?

Following on from the Ethics conference, this seminar will examine the ways that museums are acquiring geological specimens today. How is collecting actually undertaken in this country and how much is actually done? Are we active enough? Do curators have any time to collect and if not, is this limiting the development of collections? Are collections, particularly in local museums, stagnating? What material is being offered for sale and are museums still receiving significant donations? Are there good enough communication channels between museums about material being offered on the market? What are our individual collecting policies and practices and are these co-ordinated and working on a local/regional/national basis? Can GCG help to develop improved communication?

Monday 17 May

- 1100 Coffee & registration
- 1130 Welcome
- 1135 North Lincs right now: Steve Thompson, North Lincolnshire Museum
- 1200 The Jurassic of Warwickshire - recent collecting initiatives: Jon Radley, Warwickshire Museum.
- 1230 Expanding the petrology collections at the National Museum of Wales: Helen Kerbey & Jana Horak, National Museum of Wales.
- 1300 Lunch (provided)
- 1400 Collecting policies and other issues: Robin McDermott, Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.
- 1430 Collecting in archaeology: Kevin Leahy, North Lincolnshire Museum.
- 1500 Conservation and collecting - what's happening and can we do more? Jonathan Larwood, English Nature.
- 1530 Yorkshire Dinosaur Coast - working with local collectors. What have we done and where might it take us? Will Watts, Scarborough Museums & Gallery.
- 1600 Discussion followed by coffee/tea and a look around.

As GCG was founded on this day in 1974, in celebration a 30th Anniversary Dinner will be held in Scunthorpe in the evening of Monday 17 May. If you would like to attend, please mark the booking form accordingly and further details will be sent when they are available.

Tuesday 18 May

Field meeting which will offer the opportunity to collect Frodingham Ironstone material and to look at projects being undertaken collaboratively in the region by the Museum Service, the local authorities, the Lincs Wildlife Trust and the RIGS group. The morning session will run from 0900 – 1215. Lunch will be at a local pub (payable on the day) and the afternoon session will run until approximately 1530/1600.

Meeting fee: £10

Please complete the booking form on the centre pages and return it with a cheque for the meeting fee (payable to GCG) to Steve Thompson, North Lincolnshire Museum, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, North Lincs, DN15 7BD tel 01724 843533, fax 01724 270474, e-mail Steve.Thompson@northlincs.gov.uk **by Tuesday 4 May.**

24 June 2004 Augustus & Gwen John Room, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

GCG Workshop: Identifying fossils 4. Trilobites

An overview of our current knowledge of trilobites by Dr Bob Owens, drawing on specimens from the extensive collections at the National Museum of Wales.

1000 Coffee

1030 Morphology, taxonomy, evolution and palaeobiogeography of trilobites

1230 Lunch in a nearby pub (payable locally).

1400 Practical identification session, using appropriate monographs

1600 Close

Meeting fee: £5.00.

Please complete the booking form on the centre pages and return it with a cheque for the meeting fee (payable to GCG) to Tom Sharpe, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP tel 029 20 573 265, fax 029 20 667332, email Tom.Sharpe@nmgw.ac.uk **by Thursday 17 June.**

Autumn 2004 Natural History Museum and Czech Geological Survey, Prague

GCG Study Visit

This year's study visit will be to Prague, to the Czech National Museum and the Czech Geological Survey, two institutions with superb collections of fossils and minerals. For more information about the National Museum, see <http://www.nm.cz/english> and for the Geological Survey <http://www.cgu.cz/>

The visit will take place over a weekend (probably Thursday to Sunday or Monday) in October or November.

To register your interest in this study visit, and to receive further details, contact: Andrew Ross, Department of Paleontology, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD tel 0207 942 5492, fax 0207 942 5546, email A.Ross@nhm.ac.uk

9 December 2004 Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool

GCG Workshop: Meteorites

Please note change of date and venue for this workshop

Contact: Alan J Bowden, Curator of Earth Sciences, National Museums Liverpool, William Brown Street, Liverpool, L3 8EN tel 0151 478 4367 fax 0151 478 4350 email alan.bowden@liverpoolmuseums.org

As GCG Chairman Patrick Wyse Jackson will be on sabbatical in the United States in December, the AGM will be held in January 2005

**18-19 January 2005 The Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne
GCG Seminar, AGM and Field Trip: Planning for disaster, rescue and
specimen relocation**

Please note change of date

Contact: Steve McLean, The Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon
Tyne, NE2 4PT tel 0191 222 6765, fax 0191 222 6753, email s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

GEOLOGICAL
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