

DROPPINGS
FROM THE
GEOLOGICAL
CURATORS
GROUP

Coprolite is compiled and produced by David Craven, Renaissance North West, Room 1.13, The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL (tel.01612752660, email david.craven@manchester.ac.uk). It is published three times a year in March, June and November. Any material for inclusion should be sent to David by the first of the previous month, i.e. by 1 February, 1 May or 1 October.

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GCG website: <http://www.geocurator.org>

2011 Subscriptions

Hopefully by now you have all paid your 2011 subs. If not, please send payment to Cindy Howells, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NP.

If you haven't yet, please move to a standing order using the form available on the website.

Please remember to inform us if you change your address or email.

Coprolite in 2011

As you will all know, Coprolite has been heavily delayed this year. This is due to my own commitments, making it very difficult to get this first edition together. As a result of this, I will be looking at August for Coprolite 65, and November for Coprolite 66.

You can help by sending in anything you think would be of interest. The more content comes in, the easier it is to compile. We will be looking at ways to make it easier to submit content. News, articles, events, exhibitions etc can all be sent to the editor at david.craven@manchester.ac.uk, ideally in the Tahoma font, font size 10.

Proposed changes to GCG Constitution

This year, the GCG Committee has proposed a number of changes to our constitution, which was last updated in 1996. They include changes related to our affiliation to the Geological Society of London, and changes to the Officer and Committee Member posts, as well as a proposal for a concessionary subscription rate for student, retired, unemployed, or unwaged members. A revised draft constitution will be placed on the GCG website. A JISCmail notice will be sent to all members when the draft is on line. These were considered at the May meeting of GCG Committee before being sent for approval by the Geological Society and the Charity Commissioners. It is hoped that a final draft can be put to an Extraordinary General Meeting in the early autumn of 2011.

GCG Programme 2011

12-17 September 2011, Lyme Regis

59th Symposium of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Comparative Anatomy

Joint Meeting - 20th Meeting of the Symposium of Palaeontological Preparation and Conservation and the Geological Curators' Group

In 1811 Joseph Anning found the skull of a huge ichthyosaur, and with his sister Mary collected the whole animal. This and other later discoveries

brought to public attention that realisation that there had once lived animals completely different from any alive today, and that the history of the earth was vastly deeper and more complex than had previously been imagined. This stimulation of both public and scientific imagination can in many ways be seen as the origin of the science of palaeontology in the UK.

To mark the 200th anniversary of this significant event, the annual SVPCA meeting will be held in Lyme Regis, the historic town which has been the centre for the collection and preparation of fossils from the Jurassic Coast Natural World Heritage Site . With grants from the Lottery Heritage Fund, it has been possible to buy a number of important and spectacular specimens found on the coast over recent years, emphasising it's current scientific importance as well as its unique historic status.

This year GCG are joining with the SPPC to hold a joint seminar over 2 days on 12 and 13 September. Final details yet to be agreed and will be published on the GCG web site and future Coprolites.

For the full circular please visit –http://www.svPCA.org/years/2011_lyme_regis/first.circular.php

GCG Members contact details - Steve McLean, Great North Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT. 0191 222 6765, s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

GCG Workshop - The care and conservation of mineral collections.

18 October 2011

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

Practical advice on the care and conservation of mineral collection, from one of the UK's leading authorities, Monica Price.

For further information contact –. Steve McLean

**GCG Seminar and 38th AGM - Storage, sorting and documentation of geological collections - good practice & practical solutions
6 & 7 December 2011**

Leeds Museum Discovery Centre, Carlisle Road, Leeds, LS10 1LB

This two-day event includes a visit to the recently refurbished Leeds City Museum as well as the Leeds Museum Discovery Centre.

For further information contact – Steve McLean

History of Geology Group (HOGG) meeting report

Natural History Museum London

4th-5th April 2011

At the beginning of April, the History of Geology Group held a very well attended, two day meeting at the Natural History Museum in London. Timed to coincide with a Travel, Science and Natural History auction at Christies, it focussed on Geological Collectors and Collecting. Although it was not held jointly with GCG, there were a number of our members among the audience of over 100, and indeed a few were speakers too.

The first session, entitled 'Why collect?' started with Richard Fortey (Natural History Museum) recalling some of his early experiences collecting in Spitsbergen, before explaining about the many uses of museum collections. Julian Wilson from Christies, then gave us an oversight of the map and book trade, as seen from the perspective of the auctioneer, providing a more detailed look at how some individual books and maps have fared at auction through time. This session then finished with a talk by Jonathon Larwood (Natural England) explaining the difference between policies, legislation and guidance when it comes to field collecting. Schemes such as the Collecting Code on the Dorset World Heritage coast, and various others, illustrate how policies and guidance cannot be used in isolation, but work far better with co-operation and collaboration from all parties. A long lunch break then allowed time to view the galleries, and also the interesting selection of posters.

Our own Tom Sharpe kicked off the 'Map and Book Collecting' session after lunch with a talk about the first Keeper of Geology at the National Museum of Wales, F.J. North, who was responsible for initially developing the large collection of archives and maps, and particularly the impressive set of William Smith maps they now own. Stuart Baldwin (from Baldwin's Scientific Books and long standing GCG member) gave an interesting talk about his life as a book seller, particularly within the fields of natural history and geology, and gave a number of tips about where one might search for historical books. The final speaker for the day was Christopher Toland, a consultant geologist from Cheltenham, who talked about three

sets of historical maps from his own collection. He showed how research into unpublished and largely unknown maps such as these can reveal much that is interesting and shed light on hidden corners of history. This ended the afternoon session of talks, although there were tours of stores and also workshops on conservation scheduled for various slots through the day. It was unfortunate that most of these coincided with talks and might possibly have been more advisable to have had a separate late afternoon session each day just for tours and workshops.

I went on a tour to the Earth Sciences Library to see one of their lovely examples of the 1815 William Smith map laid out. It was a marvellous opportunity to see such a well preserved copy, and made an extreme contrast with the subsequent other viewing of a Smith map at Christies show room that evening. This second version had obviously suffered greatly from being varnished, hung up for many years and then thrown in a skip! This map was due to be sold in a Travel, Science and Natural History auction later in the week, and we were welcomed to Christies for the special evening viewing of the items for sale, and a talk by Julian Wilson and one of his colleagues.

The Tuesday morning session had a theme of Fossil Collecting, and started with a very interesting talk by Karolyn Shindler, a historian from London, who told us about the fascinating life and work of Barbara Yelverton, a 19th Century serious fossil collector, and Marchioness, who corresponded regularly with Professor Richard Owen, and published several papers of her own. Jonathon Radley (Warwickshire Museum) spoke about his museum, their local geology and their collectors. He explained that although the spectacular large finds of the past are now less common, there is still a lot to be gained scientifically by well documented, systematic collecting of more common fossils. It is a shame that inland exposures are becoming so rare, and are often totally inaccessible to the public.

The final speaker of this session was Richard Edmonds (Earth Sciences Manager for Dorset County Council), who talked about the many collectors, both historical and currently active, who have made so many marvellous discoveries in Dorset. He emphasised that it is mostly only due to the immense efforts of these individuals that we have saved so many scientifically important specimens from literally being washed out to sea. Unfortunately this often causes conflict with the researchers who need to study fossils in situ, but can be resolved by allowing them special access to certain untouched and uncollected areas. The policies for future management

of this World Heritage coastline are under revision, but need to take into account the requirements of the scientific community without losing the valuable contribution made by the fossil collectors, both amateur and professional, without which many of the best specimens would simply be lost.

After lunch, the 'Rock and Mineral Collecting' session started with Monica Price from the Oxford University Museum speaking about the Corsi collection of decorative stones. This is a marvellous collection of the polished building stones used historically in Rome. Corsi's intention was to create an identification aid of such decorative stones and he wrote a catalogue describing their many features, including grain-size, texture and lustre as well as colour and pattern. John Faithfull of the Hunterian Museum then spoke to us about the collections of William Hunter, an anatomist and physician, who spent vast sums of money acquiring books, coins, insects, rocks, minerals, shells, and many other items to form the basis of a research collection. His 2500 minerals and the rest of the collection, including archival catalogues, notes and bills of sale were all bequeathed to the University of Glasgow where they survive more or less intact.

The final talk of the meeting was supposed to be Chris Collins from the Conservation Unit at the NHM, but he was unexpectedly unable to attend, and his place was taken by Brian Rosen, also from the NHM who gave a short account of finding the discarded key to one of their displayed geological maps in a skip. He has rescued it, and now hopes that one day it may be restored to its rightful place again. Further 'behind the scenes' tours of the various departments, and workshops on Paper Conservation and Digital Photography were also programmed for this day.

All in all, this was a very interesting meeting with a wonderfully diverse set of talks, and delegates with a wide spread of related interests. It was lovely to be able to meet up with old friends, and to make new acquaintances, and also to hear about the different perspectives of geological collecting. If you have not thought about attending a HOGG meeting before, I urge you to look out for their meetings, and possibly as a group we should consider forming a closer relationship with them.

Cindy Howells
Department of Geology
National Museum of Wales

Meet your Committee 1: Cindy Howells - Membership Secretary

My first geological recollections are as a very young child finding some rocks that sparkled in the sun. I was fascinated by these, and was terribly excited when I later found a pyrite crystal in slate – I thought it might be gold! I was often taken to London to visit various museums, especially the Natural History Museum and I vividly remember being astounded, as a child, by the mineralogy displays upstairs in the NHM. There was an entire, and very large, gallery full of old wooden table cases with rank upon rank of classically organised minerals, all carefully labelled with words I didn't understand, but the systematics really appealed to me at the age of 8 or so.

Despite this early introduction to the delights of mineralogy, I soon became totally hooked on fossils and bought several guidebooks to help identify my small collection of treasures. I was lucky enough to go to a school which offered geology in the sixth-form so I took an O-level first, then an A-level, and then came to Cardiff to do my degree in geology.

I think I always knew I wanted to work in a museum, and was very lucky to be offered a volunteer post at the National Museum of Wales within a year of graduating. This led to a Government Training scheme post in the department, and as I showed no signs of leaving, after that I was eventually offered a proper job here!

I am now Palaeontology Collections Manager for the Department of Geology at the National Museum of Wales and feel I am very lucky to work in an organisation which, so far, still adheres to the traditional museum cultures of curation, heritage and longevity.

I have worked here for 25 years, and hope to be here until I retire. I have always been very aware that our collections are here in trust for the nation and it is our job as curators to care for them in the very best way we can. I think that the best memorial for any curator is a well documented, well cared for collection to preserve our heritage into the future.

The Hidden Science Map

www.hiddensciencemap.org

This is a great resource, allowing organisations, freelance scientists, educators, and anyone else involved in science provision to freely advertise on the web. It's good for showing what you are up to, as well as finding people you may be able to work with.

The Geology Matters website shows the history of the Earth

A new website gives visitors an insight into the rich geological heritage of the Black Country and the UK.

Geology Matters www.geologymatters.org.uk shows images of a wide range of fossils, rocks and minerals which are found within museum collections in the Black Country.

Taken as a whole, the Black Country geology is one of the largest grouped collections in the UK with specimens housed in Dudley Museum & Art Gallery, Wednesbury Museum & Art Gallery and Wolverhampton Art Gallery. These 30,000 specimens include some rare fossils such as soft bodied worms to more common fossils including the 'Dudley Bug' trilobite. Dudley has the largest collection with almost 18,000 specimens.

The website has almost 3,000 records of geology specimens from across these museums, with almost 2,000 of these records having high quality images showing a variety of views of the objects. Information provided with specimens tells the story of where it was found and its age. The collections range the full geological history of the UK from the Precambrian though to the present day.

The Geology Matters blog introduces people to the basics of geology including how fossils form and how to care for geological collections. This is done though a series of short articles written by local geologists and includes videos featuring the current Keeper of Geology at Dudley Museum & Art Gallery Graham Worton. The blog is constantly being updated with new content.

Find out about key people in history who have used the Black Country as a base for their geological knowledge, including Sir Roderick Murchison

who used fossils found at the Wrens Nest in his book on the 'Silurian System' in the early 19th Century. The website also offers a brief overview of the collectors who have made the collections special and unique within the geological world.

The site is aimed at people with very little geological knowledge. Everyone visiting the site will learn something new and find something interesting which they may not of seen before. Both professional and amateur geologists will find this a useful resource.

Many of the specimens are in permanent storage with dedicated displays at Dudley Museum & Art Gallery. Visitors wishing to see specimens will find information on where the specimen is stored and how to see it by using the information on the website.

Geology Matters has been funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives council through their Renaissance in the Regions programme. It includes information from Dudley Museums Service, Sadwell Museums Service and Wolverhampton Arts and Museums Service.

For more information go to: www.geologymatters.org.uk

Exhibitions

If you would like to share details of your current or upcoming exhibitions through Coprolite, just email the editor.

BBC Walking With Dinosaurs Exhibition

The Beacon, Whitehaven, 11th June to 4th Sept 2011

This summer The Beacon is to play host to an amazing exhibition, 65 million years in the making. The BBC Walking with Dinosaurs Exhibition, based on the award-winning BBC TV series, looks at the science behind the series and tells you more about Dinosaurs and how they lived.

This blockbuster exhibition will include scale models used to produce the digital animations, full sized Dinosaur replicas including the skulls of Tyrannosaurus and Triceratops as well as large format graphics from BBC originals and computer interactive games.

The original TV series, *Walking With Dinosaurs*, attracted over 17 million viewers and for the first time brought to life the fascinating world of these incredible creatures. This exhibition will give a unique behind the scenes experience of how the programme makers created this ground-breaking series.

Sir John St. Aubyn - *The Secret Life of a Collector*

Saffron Walden Museum, 2nd April to 4th September 2011

An exhibition featuring minerals and plant specimens collected or acquired by Sir John St. Aubyn (1758–1839). He lived at Shortgrove Hall near Saffron Walden in Essex from 1827 until 1834. The minerals are from all over the world and the displays reveal the colourful history of an 18th century collector. The touring exhibition was produced by Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery with support from The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Renaissance in the Regions.

Rock, Fossil, and Mineral Shows

Oxford Mineral and Fossil Shows

Exeter Hall, Kidlington, North Oxford

3 July, 4 December, 10.30-16.00

Bakewell Rock Exchange

Lady Manners School, Bakewell

8-9 October

Rock 'n' Gem Shows

Newcastle Racecourse, 2-3 July

Kempton Park, 6-7 August

Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, 13-14 August

Newton Abbot Racecourse, 17-18 September

Newark Showground, 24-25 September

York Racecourse, 1-2 October

Kempton Park, 29-30 October

Cheltenham Racecourse, 5-6 November

Brighton Racecourse, 19-20 November

Farnham Maltings, 26-27 November

British Lapidary & Mineral Dealers Association

Mineral, Fossil, Gem & Jewellery Fairs

Pavilions of Harrogate, 20 August 10.00-17.00, 21 August 10.00-16.00

Admission £3, u16s free

Grappenhall Youth & Community Centre, Warrington, 13 November 10.30-15.30

Admission free

Hampshire Mineral & Fossil Show

Lyndhurst Community Centre, 4 September

Admission £11, accompanied children free

New publications

If you hear of any new books coming out that would be of interest to GCG members, if you have read a book and would like to submit a review, or if you'd be interested in reviewing a book from this list, contact David Craven on david.craven@manchester.ac.uk

The Lie of the Land: An under-the-field guide to Great Britain by Ian Vince

Basalt: Types, Petrology & Uses by Janet P. West

Introduction to Mineralogy by William Nesse

Why Geology Matters: Decoding the Past, Anticipating the Future by Doug Maccougall

This Shrinking Land: Climate Change and Britain's Coasts by Robert Duck

A Digital Approach to Field Geology by Marco Foi and Angelita De Palo

A History of Iron Mining in Cornwall by Tony Brooks

The Making of Ireland's Landscape: Since the Ice Age by Valerie Hall

Living Dinosaurs: The Evolutionary History of Modern Birds by Gareth Dyke and Gary Kaiser

Survivors: The Animals and Plants that Time has Left Behind by Richard Fortey

Evolution of Fossil Ecosystems by Paul Selden and John Nudds

Geology of British Columbia: A Journey Through Time by Sydney Cannings, Richard Cannings and JoAnne Nelson

The Crato Fossil Beds of Brazil by David M. Martill, Günter Bechly and Robert F. Loveridge

Biology of the Sauropod Dinosaurs: Understanding the Life of Giants by Nicole Klein, Kristian Remes and Carole T. Gee

Meet your Committee 2: David Craven - Newsletter Editor

Like every other member of committee, my career seems to have roots in my childhood, whether collecting ammonites and belemnites from Saltwick Nab at the age of 4, or telling my teacher at the age of 6 that I wanted to be a palaeontologist (she accused me of inventing the word, which says a lot for my first primary school). This love of fossils spread into a love of all life on Earth, past and present, and birds consumed at least as much of my time, as they do to this day.

Despite this, by the time I was thinking of university those first loves had gone and I was set on a career in genetics instead, until fate (in the form of staggeringly bad exam results) sent me through clearing to a geology degree at the University of Liverpool. At no point since have I regretted this.

After university I started looking for museum work, with the plan being to work for a couple of years and go back to university for postgraduate work. This never happened.

I was offered a post at The Yorkshire Museum, and have been working my way up since then. While my role at York was principally front-of-house, I was lucky enough to be supported by great curators who gave me lots of opportunities to get involved in other projects. Probably the highlight of this spell came in 2001 when I worked on two field projects, first collecting a large Ichthyosaur from the Yorkshire coast, then returning a couple of months later to get some dinosaur footprints.

My first 'proper' geology job came in 2003 when I went to catalogue the geology collections at Bolton Museum. Over the course of six years I documented the entire collection, while also working on a number of other projects including exhibitions, education work, and outreach. During this time I was invited onto the GCG committee.

In 2009 I took my current role working across the North West, from Cumbria down to Cheshire, helping museums to make more use of their natural science collections. While the complexities of working in the Renaissance/Hub/MLA/ACE world can be frustrating, the freedom to see great collections across a region, make connections, travel, and generally root about is a perk that no amount of paperwork can diminish.

I remain firmly of the opinion we are incredibly fortunate working in museums, no matter what we may have to put up with. It's not hard to think of worse jobs, and when I describe my day to friends it's remarkable how often what seems day-to-day to us, is astonishing to them

Geology News

Much Wenlock Museum received a half-million pound HLF grant to make improvements to its museum. The redevelopments will include work focusing on the geological heritage of the area.

Keswick Museum is another that will benefit from HLF funding. The museum will soon close for a major redevelopment. Keswick has a great geology collection, as highlighted by the recent Renaissance and MA funded collections review. This review, by Dr Lucy Muir, uncovered a fossil sponge thought to be a new undescribed species.

Geology has been in the national news quite a lot recently, with volcanoes in Mexico, Chile, and Iceland all attracting headlines. With several large and destructive earthquakes also occurring in 2011, there's been a great deal of ill-informed media speculation as to one universal cause for all this activity. It's something museums may find themselves addressing with local visitors.

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science has reported collecting 100 fossils a day from the Snowmass site in Colorado. Following the discovery of mastodon bones last October, Kirk Johnson and his team have found an ice age treasure trove. The fossils were discovered during expansion work for a local reservoir.

Geological Curators Group web news

www.geocurator.org

The website continues to grow, and the number of visitors reflects this. Keep an eye on the site for all the latest news, jobs, and events. The jobs page is updated regularly, and details of interesting museum publications are added. If you have anything for the website, contact Hannah Chalk.

GCG Committee 2010

Chair:	Mike Howe, British Geological Survey
Secretary:	Helen Kerbey, National Museum of Wales
Treasurer:	John Nudds, The University of Manchester
Programme Secretary:	Steve McLean, Great North Museum, Newcastle
Minutes Secretary:	Tony Morgan, World Museum Liverpool
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Newsletter Editor:	David Craven, Manchester City Galleries (Renaissance)
Webmaster:	Hannah Chalk, University of Manchester
Committee Members:	Jeff Liston, Hunterian Museum, Glasgow Mark Evans, New Walk Museum, Leicester Jon Radley, Warwickshire Museum Owen Green, Dept. Earth Sciences, University of Oxford
Membership Secretary:	Cindy Howells, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff
NatSCA Representative:	Vacant
ICON Representative:	Adrian Doyle, Museum of London
Co-opted member:	Tom Sharpe, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

The NatSCA representative post is currently vacant as Leslie Noe has stood down to take a new job in Colombia. Leslie will be lecturing in Geosciences at the Universidad de Los Andes. I'm sure we all wish him well, and he'll be greatly missed on committee.

GCG Mailing List

If you haven't already, can I urge you to sign up for the GCG JISCMail list?

It's an excellent way to share the latest news, jobs and developments. It's also the best possible font of knowledge for your questions. A simple email is sent out to all members, and the answers come flooding back!

You can join at: <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/geo-curators.html>

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GCG Personal Subscription 2011

I enclose a cheque for £15.00/£18.00* payable to "Geological Curators Group"

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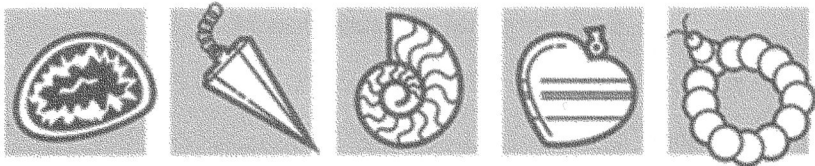
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