



DROPPINGS  
FROM THE  
GEOLOGICAL  
CURATORS  
GROUP

# OPROLITE

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1995

*Coprolite* is compiled by Tom Sharpe, National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 3NP (tel 01222 397951 ext. 265, fax 01222 667332) and produced by Monica Price, University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW. It is published three times a year in February, May and November. Any material for inclusion should be sent to Tom Sharpe by the first of the previous month, i.e. by 1 January, 1 April or 1 October.

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**Chairman:** Paul Ensom, Yorkshire Museum, Museum Gardens, York YO1 2DR  
tel. 01904 629745, fax 01904 651221

**Secretary:** Mandy Edwards, Department of Geology, University of Manchester,  
Manchester M13 9PL tel 0161 275 3825, fax 0161 275 3947,  
e-mail aedwards@fs2.ge.man.ac.uk

**Treasurer/Membership Secretary:** Andy Newman, Department of Archaeology,  
University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU  
tel/fax 0191 222 7426, e-mail andrew.newman@ncl.ac.uk

## Musical curators

**Kate Andrew**, formerly a freelance conservator, has been appointed County Curator of Natural History for Shropshire based at Ludlow Museum and took up her post in August; **Alastair Bowden** is now Assistant Curator of Geology at Clitheroe Castle Museum where he succeeds **Phil Manning** who has left to do a PhD at the University of Sheffield; **Sue Sladen**, formerly Museum Assistant at Scunthorpe Museum, has moved to Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, Spalding, where she is Museum and Tourist Information Officer with South Holland District Council; **Dale Johnston**, who has just completed the Leicester course, has been appointed Exhibitions Assistant at Woodhorn Colliery Museum in Ashington, Northumberland, and took up his post in October; **Jon Radley**, formerly Curatorial Assistant at the Museum of Isle of Wight Geology has been appointed Curator of Geology at Bristol Museum and took up his post in mid October; **Mike Taylor**, Depute Curator of Perth Museum has been appointed head of arts and heritage in the new district council of Perthshire and Kinross.

### **New members**

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Dr Paul D Taylor**, Natural History Museum, London; **Paul G Davis**, University of Bristol; **Phillippa E J Brewer**, Bolton.

### **A G Brighton Medal**

The A G Brighton Medal, awarded every three years by the Geological Curators' Group, has been awarded this year to Dr Bob King. Bob is well known to many of our members and has been associated with the Group since its inception in his office at the University of Leicester in 1974. Bob will be presented with the medal at the AGM in Ludlow on 29 November when it is hoped that many of his friends and colleagues will be present.

### **GCG Chairman 1996-1998**

John Nudds, Keeper of Geology at Manchester Museum and GCG Recorder has been nominated by GCG Committee as the next Chairman of the Group.

### **GCG membership list 1995**

With this issue of *Coprolite* you will find a list of members which is intended as a handy reference for when you want to contact other geology curators. The list is based on the returns of the form printed in *Coprolite* no.16 in February. Unfortunately, less than half of the membership responded, so the list is far from complete. Nevertheless, it is hoped that you will find it useful. We intend to publish the list annually, so please help to make future editions more comprehensive by completing the forms with the subscription renewal every year.

### ***Urgent: items needed for the Geological Curator***

The *Geological Curator* now appears twice a year, in March and September. You should have received volume 6, part 4 (September 1995) recently. The backlog of papers that were with the Editor, and due for publication, has now been cleared. However, there is now an alarming shortage of papers for consideration for inclusion in future issues of the *Geological Curator*. It is possible that the next issue (March 1996) will contain one paper, the minutes of the 1995 AGM, and some book reviews. This would be unfortunate, but I don't want to disrupt the publishing schedule that now exists, by waiting for possible submissions that would 'beef up' the issue. If members want a journal full of papers, notes, fact files, lost and found notes, and other items, then it is up to them to write and submit manuscripts (three printed copies and on disk and via e-mail if possible). With electronic mail, the time from submission to publication can be as little as two months. I await your submissions.

Patrick N Wyse Jackson, Editor, Department of Geology, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland tel 00 353 1 702 1074, fax 00 353 1 671 1199, e-mail wysjcknp@tcd.ie

### **GCG Archive has moved**

GCG Archive has moved with GCG Archivist, Sue Sladen, from Scunthorpe to Spalding. Anyone who has archive material should send it to Sue Sladen, Museum and Tourist Information Officer, Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, Churchgate, Spalding, Lincolnshire PE11 2RA.

### **GCG on WWW**

GCG Secretary Mandy Edwards and Committee member John Faithfull are looking into publicising the Group and its activities through GCG Home Pages on the World Wide Web. Further details will follow in a future issue of *Coprolite*, but it is hoped that the official launch of the Home Pages will take place at the Liverpool seminar next summer.

### **Curators' Job-Share Register**

Job-sharing has increasingly been recognised by employers as an efficient and effective way of working and hailed by many as the way of working for the future. The reality today, though, is rather different and as potential job-sharers we are still faced with having either to find suitable job partners ourselves or often accept less favourable terms.

The Curators' Job-Share Register, open to all Curators in the UK, provides an essential first step; by putting potential job-sharers in touch with one another it should encourage and develop career progression when full-time employment is not an option.

The Register can be called upon at any time: whether you are looking for a long term job partner to share an existing full-time job, or a partner to suit a particular advertised job. The only thing it can't do is find the job itself.

The Register has the support of the Museums Association and is run voluntarily, out of a commitment to provide potential job-sharers with a much-needed service. An initial fee of £2.50 allows members to be notified by first-class post five times, after which a further fee is payable.

For an information sheet and subscription form please call: Francesca Alden on 01582 467 220 (Evenings only, please, between 19.30 and 21.30).

### **30th International Geological Congress 1996**

#### **Applications for Royal Society Support**

The Congress will be held in Beijing on 4-14 August 1996, with excursions during the preceding and succeeding 14 days.

The Royal Society is prepared to allocate grants towards the cost of participation in the Congress and attendance on field trips. Applications for support should be made to the Royal Society by 18 January 1996. Application forms are available from Miss J E C Lewis, ACIS Grant Manager, The Royal Society, 6 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AG.

### **Free publicity!**

The Yorkshire Geological Society sends out a circular to its membership each month from September to March. The Circular Editor, Paul Kabrna, 6 Colne Road, Barnoldswick, Colne, Lancashire BB8 5QU would be pleased to have details of geological exhibitions and events which could be included in the Circular, space permitting.

### **SET96**

The 1995 week featured over 3000 events, many organised by or based in museums around the country. A look at the programme, a substantial 48 page newspaper, with events listed by region, shows a remarkable diversity. There is still plenty of room for geology, and just enough time to place your event!.

The 1996 'week' of science, engineering and technology events will begin on 15 March. Regional and national programmes are being printed in early November. There is no time to lose if you want to get your event in and wave a flag for geology, your museum, and museums in general. Contact: SET96, The British Association, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 2NB, tel 0171 973 3500, fax 0171 973 3051.

### **Bath is back**

Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, now run by an independent trust, has reopened its building in Queen's Square. The Grade I listed building has been refurbished and the first geological exhibition in the Moore Room is *Here be dragons - recent dinosaur discoveries in the south-west*, on show until the end of February. The RLSI's plans for the building include a permanent display of the geological collections and their other important collections, a library, research room, school activity room, temporary exhibition gallery, and shop.

### **Ludlow geological resources centre**

As part of a new library complex, Shropshire Museum Service is undertaking a feasibility study for a geological resources centre. This would provide new storage for the geology collections, a lecture room, laboratory and an area for visitors working on the collections.

### **Help a homeless echinoid**

The Ulster Museum is seeking a good home for several hundred echinoids from the Upper Chalk of Seaford Head, Sussex. These are mainly *Micraster spp.* with bryozoan and other encrusters, which were collected by R E H Reid for a research project on encrusting communities which was subsequently abandoned. Approximately one third of the material has been cleaned of chalk matrix, but the remainder is as collected. Anyone interested in this material should contact Andy Jeram, Geology Department, Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB tel 01232 381215

## MDA launches Documentation for Registration Pack

In response to the MGC's launching of Phase II of its successful Registration Scheme, the MDA has produced a pack called Documentation for Registration which is available free on request. It is intended to help museums assess whether their documentation systems meet the standard recommended for Phase II.

Providing a framework and focus, the pack's Documentation Checklist enables self-evaluation by a series of questions based on agreed good practice. These questions are rooted in the standards set out for procedures in *SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard* which is a guide to good practice rather than a system in itself. Thus the principles of *SPECTRUM* may be applied to existing systems whether manual or computerised.

The Checklist should help museums identify any shortcomings in their present systems. Further information in the pack shows how MDA can help museums through *SPECTRUM*, through training courses, resources and free fact sheets. MDA Outreach is grant-funded to provide a range of free advice and training on all aspects of museum documentation.

For your free Documentation for Registration Pack or for further advice, please telephone MDA on 01223 242848.

## MODES

MDA has reassured MODES and Catalyst users that help desk support and training would continue, after announcing in July that the latest releases would be the final developments to the MODES programs.

Wendy Sudbury, Chief Executive, underlined that MODES users enjoy benefits of much wider significance than simply the features of a software program. The most important is a sense of belonging to a large user group, united by common standards and ideas of good practice, supported by MDA's help desk, and by MODES advisors who are experienced museum or archive professionals and willingly give their time. Users also value the training provided by MDA Services. All these will continue.

'There is no reason why any museum or archive which is happily using MODES or Catalyst need stop doing so, indeed the presumption is that most museums will not feel any need to change. New users are joining the MODES community all the time, and no-one really expects there to be a serious alternative to Catalyst for some years yet'.

Many people are unaware that there has been no public funding for MODES for five years now, and that MGC grant-aid is conditional on MDA Services being self-supporting. With declining sales for MODES, the options available to MDA were very limited, especially since MDA is a registered charity and subject to restrictions on trading and risk. More and more museums want systems that run under Windows, which would involve a complete rewrite of the program.

Sudbury stressed that the MDA remained committed to standards, and making those benefits available to all, including those who don't choose - for whatever reason - to use MODES. 'If we didn't have SPECTRUM the future might look rather different, but there are now several vendors who are keen to offer SPECTRUM-compatible products'. There are plans to set up a MODES user group which will review ongoing requirements and ensure a strong voice for the Object and Archives Formats and the powerful data entry functions found in the MODES programs. 'MODES users represent a huge market, and any developer worth his salt is going to recognise the value of meeting the needs of that ready pool of potential customers'. However, she stressed that no-one was being forced to change. 'If MODES Plus or Catalist suits your needs today, there is absolutely no reason to think about changing'.

In the meantime, David Dawson, MDA Services' Business Manager, announced the release of *InTouch*, a program which gives access to the data contained in MODES Plus and Catalist files. Designed to be used by members of the public, *InTouch* combines data and images to make information available to visitors, researchers, schools and non-computer-using staff. An innovative licensing approach will be to make a 'read-only' version available at a small additional cost so that museums and archives can distribute their information without further licensing restrictions.

Footnote.

SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard is a *standard*, not a system. An analogy can be drawn with telephones: certain conventions ("standards") such as 0171 to access London exchanges, or 00 to access the international system, ensure that we can call each other up from almost anywhere in the world, regardless of the telephone system we use. MODES is a *system*, and has historically been almost the *only system* available if museums wanted to use the MDA Data Standard. Now that there is a broader consensus, and a standard that is independent of any systems that implement it, the result is likely to be more, not less, take up of standards. After this latest upgrade, MODES Plus will be the first available program that supports Spectrum's *units of information*.

### **Forthcoming meetings and seminars**

**6-10 November 1995 Edinburgh**

**7th International Conference of the MDA: Information: the hidden resource. Museums and the Internet.**

Contact: Frances Bycroft, Museum Documentation Association, 347 Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge CB1 4DH tel 01223 242848, fax 01223 213575, e-mail [mda@mdocassn.demon.co.uk](mailto:mda@mdocassn.demon.co.uk)

**29-30 November 1995 Assembly Rooms, Mill Street, Ludlow**

**GCG seminar, fieldtrip, and AGM: Geology for all - the role of the curator in developing the public understanding of geology.**

The museum is the shop window for our science, providing 'geology for all'; that

is, for all ages, levels of interest, ability and disability. As a 'frontliner' the way in which the curator presents geology is crucial in formulating the public's perception of the subject. Are we succeeding in this task? What is being done by curators to make our science more accessible? This meeting will look at the problems of communicating geology to a wide selection of user groups - particularly the young. It will also examine the needs and expectations of our visitors, review the museum's changing role and examine new and innovative schemes to bring 'geology to all'.

### **Wednesday 29 November**

- 10.30 Registration and coffee
- 11.00 Welcome and review of geological developments in Ludlow: John Hirst, Director of Information and Community Services, Shropshire County Council.
- 11.15 Introduction: 'Geology for all'; defining the curator's role: Colin Reid, Dudley Museum
- 11.35 The public perception of geology through museum displays and activities: Tom Hose, Faculty of Leisure and Tourism, The Buckinghamshire College
- 11.55 How effective are museums at communicating geology to the primary school child?: Kate Pontin, Hillingdon Heritage Service
- 12.15 Geology for the second childhood: Andrew Mathieson, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery
- 12.35 Discussion
- 12.45 Presentation of Brighton Medal by Paul Ensom, GCG Chairman
- 13.00 Lunch and opportunity to inspect the Norton geological gallery
- 14.15 LET ME SHOW YOU! Getting to grips with special needs: Ann Tynan, Science Museum
- 14.40 Harnessing youthful enthusiasm: Diana Hawkes, Haslemere Educational Museum
- 15.00 Discussion
- 15.15 Tea
- 15.30 21st Annual General Meeting
- 16.15 Depart

### **Thursday 30 November**

Field day beginning with a brief tour of Ludlow geological collection. This will be followed by an excursion to a number of classic Silurian localities around Ludlow and Much Wenlock, including Ludford Lane and the quarries on Wenlock Edge. **Meet at Museum Service Offices in Old Street, Ludlow at 9.00am.** NB Limited parking is available in the car park at the Museum Offices. Meeting fee: £2.50 (29 November only), £5.50 (both days). Please complete the form on page 24 and return it, with payment, to GCG c/o Kate Andrew, Ludlow Museum, Old Street, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1NW by **17 November 1995**

**8 December 1995 Charles Wilson Building, Main Campus, University of Leicester**

**Museum Studies Christmas Lectures: The museum in your living room. Museums and the broadcasting media.**

How are museums exploiting traditional broadcasting media to provide greater public access to information about their collections, and to encourage greater public interest in these collections? Is this an area which is under-exploited by museums? Museums are experimenting with the potential of new media technology: satellite tv, cable networks, the Internet. What potential can this brave new world offer museums, whether they be national museums, large regionals, or small, local museums?

The 1995 Christmas Lectures will consider these questions, and will provide practical advice about the development of productive partnerships between museums and the broadcasting media.

12.15-16.50. Speakers:

Kelvin Boot, Freelance Curator / The Natural History Programme, BBC Radio 4: A shot in the arm or a pain in the neck? Museums and the media - a museum perspective.

Carol Haslam, Freelance Commissioning Producer: The media maze - finding ways of working together.

Eric Greenwood and Phil Phillips, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside: Discovery through telepresence. The Barclays Life JASON Project and NMGM's experiments with satellite and cable technology.

Robin Boast, Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology: Toys for the boys? An alternative view of the Internet.

Fee: £24.00 (including lunch), £12.50 (excluding lunch), student concessions: £12.50, with lunch; £2.00 without.

Contact: Janet Owen, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7LG

**16 February 1996 Geological Society, Burlington House, London  
History of Geology Group / Society for the History of Natural History:  
Geological collectors and collecting**

Speakers will include John Thackray on the Thomas Hawkins collection of fossil vertebrates at the Natural History Museum, Patrick Boylan on William Buckland's Instructions for conducting geological investigations and collecting specimens (1821) and its deeper strategies, and Mike Bassett on Linnaeus and Thomas Pennant: collectors and collaborators.

Contact: John Cooper, Booth Museum of Natural History, 194 Dyke Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 5AA

**11-12 April 1996 Wadham College, Oxford**

**10th International Conference of the Society for the History of Natural History: Empires of nature**

Contact: Jane Pickering, The University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW tel 01862 272950 fax 01865 272970  
e-mail jane.pickering@oum.ox.ac.uk

**14-17 April 1996 University of Leicester**

**4th International Conference in Museum Studies: Carry on collecting? Developing a strategy for the future of collecting**

Contact: Simon Knell or Kevin Moore, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7LG

**30 April 1996 University of Newcastle upon Tyne**

**GCG / BCG Seminar: Training - the way forward**

Contact: Andrew Newman, Department of Archaeology, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU tel/fax 0191 222 7426, e-mail andrew.newman@mcl.ac.uk

**Late June / early July 1996 Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool**

**GCG Seminar: Promoting museums with new technology and the official launch of GCG's Home Pages on the World Wide Web**

The phenomenal growth of the Internet, which shows no sign of stopping or slowing down, will provide museums with a great opportunity to increase access to the collections and the services they provide. What opportunities are available and who is taking them? What are the opportunities for small museums with limited budgets? This meeting aims to provide a forum for people to describe their experiences and provide guidance on joining the information superhighway.

Contact: Mandy Edwards, Department of Geology, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL tel 0161 275 3825, fax 0161 275 3947, e-mail aedwards@fs2.ge.man.ac.uk

**10-13 June 1996 Budapest, Hungary**

**Third International Conference on Mineralogy and Museums.**

Contact: M&M 3 Secretariat, c/o Department of Mineralogy, Eötvös University, Budapest, Múzeum krt. 4/A, H-1088 Hungary fax (361) 266 7952, e-mail emin003@ursus.bke.hu

**20-24 August 1996 St John's College, Cambridge**

**Second International Symposium and World Congress on the Preservation and Conservation of Natural Science Collections: Natural science collections - a resource for the future.**

Contact: Chris Collins, Natural Science Congress '96, Geological Conservation Unit, Department of Earth Sciences, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EQ tel 01223 62522, fax 01223 60779.

**30 September-4 October 1996 Harrogate  
Museums Association 102nd Annual Conference**

Contact: Sue Robinson, Conference Organiser, Museums Association, 42 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1R 0PA fax 0171 250 1929

**'The Nation's collections': are we virtually there?**

*It is proposed to call a meeting of the Curators of a few provincial museums...to discuss the possibility of obtaining...a compendious index of the contents of all provincial Museums and collections...H M Platnauer, 29 February 1888*

More than a century after that meeting (out of which the Museums Association was born) there is still no such 'compendious index'. Since then, of course, the number of objects it might include has grown innumerable.

Innumerable because we just can't put a figure on it. Yet museums continue to collect an ever wider range of material. As we all know, there are scarcely enough funds to curate the collections our museums hold now. It is inconceivable that a hundred years from now there will be funds to look after not only our present collections, but those of another century of unchecked collecting.

You know from your own museum experience that it is impossible to manage your collections without information about them. MDA believes that this is as true on a national scale as it is within individual museums. In short, there is a strategic role for museum documentation which we ignore to our long-term cost.

This does not imply a single National Database of the 'compendious index' variety. A networked bulletin board, for example, might allow curators simply to coordinate their work as never before.

MDA is holding a series of linked events to consider whether museums need to think in terms of 'The Nation's collections' and, if so, how collections information might play a part in this process. The meetings are free. If you cannot attend in person, you can still participate in the debate. Each event will be written up as a briefing which MDA will send to anyone who would like copies. Comments and suggestions by post or e-mail would also be welcomed.

**Tuesday 7 November 1995, 2.00-5.00pm. Edinburgh.**

**'The nation's collections': technical options**

A free workshop looking at the technical issues involved in sharing information about "The Nation's Collections". The workshop has been organised to coincide with the start of MDA's seventh international conference, *Information: The Hidden Resource*, in Edinburgh - but is open to all.

**Wednesday 6 December 1995, 2.00-5.30pm. The Graduate Centre, Cambridge**  
**Lost for words?**

Museums have long recognised the need for standard term lists when documenting their collections. Without controlled terminology, searching becomes a hit and miss affair within individual museum databases: retrieving information about

'The Nation's Collections' across many databases would be even more difficult. This seminar will take stock of the various initiatives underway and consider how best to build on the work already carried out.

**Wednesday 21 February 1996, 2.00-5.00pm. Museums & Galleries Commission, London**

### **The way forward**

Previous events in this series have considered what it would take to share information about 'The Nation's Collection'. This final seminar brings together the various strands covered during those events and consider options for the future.

For further information, contact Frances Bycroft, MDA, Lincoln House, 347 Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge CB1 4DH tel 01223 242848, fax 01223 213575, e-mail mda@mdocassn.demon.co.uk

### **GCG Seminar: Down in the dumps?**

**The past, present and future of site documentation.**

**London, 29 June 1995**

The meeting was opened by John Cooper with a historical review of site documentation including the early days at Leicester and specifically how it had worked at Brighton. He also raised a number of points that he hoped to see discussed during the day, concerning the direction that site documentation should now take.

Following this, Cornwall's Colin Sparrow gave an interesting account of problems encountered in his area. Particularly concerning was the news of the misuse of the Derelict Land Grant by planners to 'improve' old mine and quarry sites. Colin outlined the way in which the integrity of sites may be damaged by activities such as levelling spoil tips, plugging shafts and adits and landscaping exposures. The high level of ignorance among planners and sundry local government officials about geological conservation in this area is very surprising considering that Cornwall is applying for World Heritage Site status on grounds of its mineralogical past! Colin sensibly advocated communication between all parties involved in geological site conservation and planners to avoid the destruction of geological sites.

David Curry gave a short well prepared talk on the use of temporary sites such as road cuttings for education and research. He questioned the ability of geological curators to react fast enough to ensure that parties recording site details used a standard format.

Unfortunately two of the timetabled speakers were unavailable on the day so a discussion followed. Points were raised on the subjects of paying for access to sites, insurance for local authority employees when visiting quarries and similar localities and the 'infiltration and subversion' of wildlife trusts. For the latter it was pointed out that trusts are democratically organised and reflect the views

of their members. Hence it should be relatively easy to educate trust members about the importance of the preservation of geological sites. It was noted that Peter Toghill in Shropshire was a good example of how good relations with Wildlife trusts can be developed and maintained. Also it was noted that biological and geological conservation can often go hand in hand.

After lunch Mick Stanley of Hull Museums and Art Galleries reported on the results of the Geological Records questionnaire. Although not all of the 55 centres had responded, nevertheless some useful conclusions could be drawn. For example 50% of centres had computerised records, 55% have back up copies of records and 70% felt that they could benefit from some sort of additional publicity, a point that was followed up later in the day by Dr Carson.

Again a discussion followed concentrating on RIGS documentation, how computerised records should be kept and updated, and the need for a central national database.

Durham County Council is the first in the country to have a Geological Conservation Strategy. Julie Stobbs gave a good account of why this was necessary. Durham has only 12 SSSI's of geological importance. However some 67 other sites of geological or geomorphological were identified by local geologists as having regional value. Julie outlined measures for the implementation and monitoring of the strategy for these sites as laid down in the draft Structure Plan.

The final presentation of the day by Dr Greg Carson investigated the relationship between RIGS and NSGSD (National Scheme for Geological Site Documentation). Further he looked at the public's perception of geology and geological sites. By analogy with the RSPB he showed how public perception of an organisation's work can be tailored for popular appeal, which may differ markedly from the true purpose of that organisation.

A general discussion followed with great concern being expressed about the long-term conservation of records. The need for a central data base to safeguard records was again expressed, and that it would be desirable to have a full time officer to administer this. Closing remarks, motions and thanks were tabled by GCG chairman Paul Ensom, and the meeting thus concluded.

Altogether it was an interesting day with many different examples of site documentation being given and a number of knotty problems being aired and possible solutions suggested.

Matthew Stephens

### **NSGSD - the future**

At the close of the GCG Seminar 'Down in the dumps? the past, present and future of site documentation' held at the Geological Society on 29 June 1995 the following were agreed by those present:

1. The meeting reaffirms the value of the NSGSD.
2. The meeting confirms that there is a valid role for the geological curator in the scheme.
3. The meeting recommends that the Committee of the GCG or their officers should seek a solution to the coordination of the scheme.

**Museums Association Conference/UKIC Workshop:  
Assessing and managing risks to your collection  
University of Leicester 11-12 September 1995**

This very successful and stimulating workshop was organised by Kate Andrew, Jane Pickering, Maggie Reilly and Clare Valentine of UKIC. It was run by the Canadian Museum of Nature (CMN) and attended by 46 participants.

The workshop provided the opportunity to experience a unique methodology developed by the CMN, for establishing priorities in the area of preventative conservation based on a process of risk assessment and risk management. Robert Waller, Sylvie Marcil and Jean-Marc Gagnon were most professional and effective in communicating their method.

The fun and brainstorming began immediately as teams were organised and gave their expectations of the workshop. The brainstorming sessions benefitted from the presence of 'facilitators' coming from a wide range of disciplines and institutions. The first day was spent learning how to assess risk. Groups were asked to identify specific risks ranging from earthquakes and bomb damage to leaking pipes and embezzlement, and these were slotted into a table of the ten agents of deterioration. The table was then used to demonstrate that the agents could be grouped into three risk types. The final part of the day, spent calculating the magnitude of risk, proved much more difficult, especially for the non-mathematicians. The hypothetical 'Frere Jaques Herbarium', vulnerable to a multiplicity of risks, was used for this exercise. After much head-scratching and grappling with 'fractional susceptibility', 'probability' and 'loss in value', all groups managed to produce answers.

The second day looked at managing risks to collections, again using the same case study. Methods of controlling risks were identified, and each group, looking at a specific risk, worked out the different levels for applying these controls. The final session, evaluating costs and benefits of the strategies in both the long and short term, produced the most lively presentations with ingenious ideas and much wit.

This splendidly organised workshop gave a fresh and practical approach to the often rather dry subjects of preventative conservation and collections management. Participants went away feeling able to produce disaster plans and collections reports, and also able to present convincing arguments for investment into preventative conservation.

## Exhibitions

**Messel fossils:** Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast until 25 February 1996

**Here be dragons:** Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Queens Square, Bath until 29 February 1996

**Mammoths and the Ice Age:** Snowdonia Museum, Llanberis until end November 1995

## Travelling dinosaurs

The Dinosaur Society UK is producing a travelling exhibition called *Dinosaurs in art - interpretations through art and science*. The exhibition will focus on the association of scientific discovery, interpretation, reconstruction and artistic interpretation. It will contain fossil material, factual data and artists' impressions and models. It will draw the public's attention to the close ties that exist between the scientist and illustrator and examine in detail the trends and developments over the last 160 years, from the time of Buckland's *Megalosaurus* to the hubris of *Jurassic Park*. In the main, the art panels will concentrate as much as possible on the work of UK artists. The scientific content will draw on global data.

The exhibition requires about 95 square metres of floor area plus 155 square metres of wall and will be available from April 1996. For further details of content, availability and costs, contact Mrs Jenny Bradbury, The Dinosaur Society UK, PO Box 329, Canterbury, Kent CT4 5GB tel 01227 700116, fax 01227 700473

## Dr Fraser's Fossils

A small new permanent geology gallery 'Dr Fraser's Fossils' is now open at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. This Victorian-style display is full of fossils, facts and fun, and aims particularly to introduce children to the fascinating world of fossils. Visitors can find out what snakestones and devil's toenails are, discover how a 180 million year old fish became a fossil, guess who is likely to become a future fossil, listen to a talking geological clock and glimpse through 'magic mirrors' to see what the Wolverhampton area was like millions of years ago.

The fossils are from the collection of the late Dr John Fraser (1820-1909) which was bequeathed to the borough of Wolverhampton in 1911. John Fraser lived in Chapel Ash for over 50 years and besides being a medical practitioner, he was an active fossil collector and one of Staffordshire's foremost botanists. The gallery also includes a reconstruction of Dr Fraser's desk, providing an insight into his life, work, interests and friends.

The collection, originally of 10,000 fossils, rocks and minerals, first came to the Art Gallery in 1914 but at the outbreak of the Second World War it was stored in the Central Library and then transferred in 1952 to Wolverhampton Technical

College. In 1970, when the Technical College became a Polytechnic, most of the specimens were moved to Himley Hall.

In the early 1980's the deteriorating state of the collection and the disappearance of specimens became a subject of concern and a campaign was started to save this once fine collection. In 1984 the collection was returned to Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The new gallery is the final phase of the 'rescue' which was funded by Wolverhampton Council, the Museums and Galleries Commission, the West Midlands Area Museum Service and Tarmac plc. It is also the fulfillment of John Fraser's wish that his collection should be used for the education and enjoyment of the people of Wolverhampton.

Rosemary Roden

### **Tyrrell Museum's 10th birthday**

In September, the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology celebrated its 10th anniversary. Since the museum opened in 1985, 4.6 million people have visited the purpose-built museum in Drumheller, Alberta. The anniversary was marked by an exhibition called *Decade of discoveries* showing a selection of specimens collected by the museum during the last 10 years, and by the addition of a number of new specimens to the displays. These include mounted skeletons of *Albertosaurus* and an ankylosaur; a spectacular new long-necked plesiosaur; a new Miocene early elephant skeleton; and a new family of frilled dinosaurs. In addition, a new gallery on the terrestrial environments of the Palaeozoic was officially opened on 23 September. This is the second phase of a three-part redevelopment of the Palaeozoic galleries, begun last year.

### **The Evolution House**

A major new permanent glasshouse exhibition on the evolution of plants, the Evolution House, has opened at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The exhibition was sponsored by Enterprise Oil plc and is the first of a new generation of displays made possible through commercial sponsorship.

Visitors are transported back to the harsh Precambrian world of volcanoes and lava and step by step, see how plant life emerged as the earth cooled. Using a technique known as Landscape Immersion to create the feeling of a real and believable environment, the route moves through four main time zones - Precambrian, Silurian, Carboniferous and Cretaceous. A few of the specimens are represented by models, but Kew is able to exhibit many examples of primitive plants - from liverworts to cycads - from its own living collections. Each zone is contained in realistic rock formations (using 150 cubic metres of real rock as well as reconstructions) with a cliff face and waterfalls dominating the end of the glasshouse as a dramatic backdrop.

As well as interpretation boards, key messages are given along the route in the form of the spoken word, and smells, sounds and effects play an important part

in adding atmosphere: a sulphurous smell by a Precambrian bubbling mudpot; a peaty aroma, marsh gas bubbles, and mist rolling around the Coal Measures swamp; and the sound of dinosaurs munching the Mesozoic vegetation.

The exhibition cost £650,000 and it was designed and installed by MET Studio of London.

### **Geology in the desert**

Staff from the Department of Geology at the National Museum of Wales are currently working on a new geology gallery for a natural history museum being built in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. The gallery is based on the NMW's *Evolution of Wales*, using similar layout, graphics and film, but reflecting, of course, the geology of the eastern Arabian Peninsula. The designers of the Cardiff exhibition, Haley Sharpe Associates of Leicester, are also responsible for the displays in Sharjah. The museum, which also includes botany and marine galleries, is scheduled to open in early November.

### **Mineral Shows**

**4-5 November 1995 Kempton Park Rock 'n' Gem Show**, Grand Hall, Kempton Park Racecourse, Staines Road East, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex 10.00-17.00.

Contact: HD Promotions tel 01628 21697 or 01494 450504, fax 01494 450245.

**25 November 1995 Sussex Mineral Show**, Clair Hall, Haywards Heath, Sussex 10.00-16.30. This year's show will feature an exhibition of minerals from the Richard Barstow Collection mounted by Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery and a display of Australian minerals by dealers 'Crystal Classics'. There will also be public lectures by Malcolm Southwood of the British Micromount Society on Tsumeb minerals and by David Bone of the West Sussex Geological Society on fossil hunting.

Contact: Sussex Mineral and Lapidary Society tel 01444 233958.

**17 March 1996 Oxford Spring Mineral and Fossil Show** at the Exeter Hall, Oxford Road, Kidlington (just north of Oxford) 10.00-16.30. Once again, the Oxford University Museum will be open (12.00-16.00) with a special bus service between the Museum and Show, which is at a new, larger venue.

Contact: Paul Lowe, Endsleigh House, 50 Daniell Road, Truro TR1 2DA. Tel/fax: 01872 223227.

### **Lessons from the Dutch?**

Earlier this year I had an opportunity to spend eight weeks working in the Mineralogy - Petrology Department of the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden in the Netherlands. Some of the approaches used in the Netherlands may have applications in other countries.

The weekend of 22-23 April was designated 'Museum Weekend' in the Netherlands. During this time many museums laid on special activities and entry charges were waived or greatly reduced by most of the museums involved. The event was very well publicised, especially through a poster campaign during the final weeks before it.

As for geological activities, a few museums exhibited extra material or encouraged children to display their geological collections in the museum. Visitors were encouraged to bring specimens for identification. At the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden there were no geological activities but visitors were able to see the skeletons of two whales stranded earlier this year on the coast near the Hague, and to see some areas of the zoology stores. A video was shown telling the story of the collection and preparation of the whales. Though the skulls had not yet been fully cleaned (as testified by the potent smell in the courtyard of the museum!) this didn't seem to deter the approximately 5700 visitors who came during the two days of the event. The museum received reports in many newspapers and had several minutes of television coverage.

Perhaps a similar nationwide museum event, but concentrating on the natural sciences, would be one way of raising awareness of the value of natural science collections and giving governing bodies the opportunity to show their support for the Manchester Principles. It might just have a greater impact than the Manchester Conference itself has had so far.

On the Sunday of Museum Weekend (the timing was coincidental) the Amsterdam International Mineral and Fossil Börse was held. Compared with the mineral shows at Munich and Paris this one is apparently quite small, but a sports hall and its equivalent size again were filled with stalls, and the place was bustling with people including many children.

The first stalls that visitors came to were not those of traders but those of the Netherlands Geological Survey, one of the Dutch geological museums and other non-directly commercial groups. The museum staff had several display cases with them as well as publicity leaflets and a photo album showing some of the museum's current projects. It seemed a good way to publicise the non-monetary values of specimens - indeed an appropriate counter balance at an event where people tend to see only monetary values. If a museum had a stall at a mineral or fossil fair with a banner saying 'How to increase the value of your collection' I am sure it would attract people's attention. In this way collectors could be encouraged to more carefully document their collections; an action which would ultimately benefit the museums who may in due course receive these collections.

As for what was in the fair itself, in addition to the mineral stalls there were also fossils, meteorites, geological equipment, cutting and polishing equipment and second hand geological books and journals for sale.

Featuring on many stalls were specimens of rough and polished Banded Iron Formation from Australia, fire opal from Mexico, anyolite (Cr-zoisite amphibolite containing ruby) from Tanzania and good quality lapis lazuli from Afghanistan. Some of the lapis had been stained to enhance the colour, a fact not declared to customers. Buyers beware!

Rarer specimens included deep pink well-formed crystal groups of kunzite from Pakistan, transparent precious opal (hyalite) from Mexico and large pieces (around 25g) of gem quality orthoclase with excellent clarity and deep yellow-green colour.

The quality of specimens varied considerably as did the information with them. I noticed several stalls selling small bottles of native gold which were almost certainly from the same locality. Asked where the gold originally was panned I got four different replies; Finland, Peru, Columbia and, to my surprise, England!

The lesson would seem to be that mineral and fossil fairs are very useful places to get a feel for what new material has been discovered where, but if detailed locality information is not given with the specimens be wary. Also look out for artificial treatment of gem materials.

Dale Johnston.

### **SPECTRUM: Keeping the Standard Flying**

*SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard*, published by the Museum Documentation Association (MDA), has been out in the museum community for well over a year now and is becoming established as a valuable tool for anyone working with collections. As familiarity with *SPECTRUM* grows, more and more museums are incorporating it into their working practice. Museums have already used *SPECTRUM* in producing procedures manuals, writing policy reviews, drawing up job specifications, and generally improving their procedures. But has *SPECTRUM* reached its full potential? Whilst aiming to provide a standard for all museums, does *SPECTRUM* meet all its targets? Does it address all its audiences? If not, how can it develop further to be of even greater value to the museum community?

In essence, *SPECTRUM* is the crystallisation of the skills and expertise of the UK museum community, brought together through a series of working groups that addressed various areas of activity. And the museum community can be rightly proud of *SPECTRUM*. It is a world first in a number of important ways. It takes a procedural approach; looking at what actually happens to objects in a museum context, and then dealing with how to handle the information associated with those procedures. By identifying twenty discrete procedures it covers all aspects of collections documentation, and is not limited just to cataloguing items. However, the most important aspect of the co-operative origin of *SPECTRUM* is the fact that it is accessible and relevant to all museums,

regardless of their size or type, or what systems they use to document their collections. This is achieved by defining standards for museums to attain, without being prescriptive about how to achieve them.

This universality of SPECTRUM can be seen as its greatest strength, allowing everyone to use it on equal terms. However, to include options to deal with every occasion does tend to make it appear a little unwieldy. For most of the individuals using SPECTRUM this is not a problem. It is well suited to their everyday requirements, and even to their less common ones, and where there is too much detail, they can make their own selection of what to include. On the other side of the coin, the value of SPECTRUM to the generalist, needing to know a certain amount about most things, can seem to be a limitation for the specialist, with requirements that are so specific to his or her area of interest that they are not included. The fact that SPECTRUM works well for the majority of its users does not mean that it cannot be further developed for the benefit of specialist groups. Geology curators undoubtedly are a specialist group.

SPECTRUM only has value if it is useful, so it is essential that it continues to progress and develop to meet the demands of the museum community. Feedback from users of SPECTRUM is essential to steer change in the right direction. At MDA's Workshop in October 1994 a number of discussion sessions gave natural scientists a chance to look at how SPECTRUM could be extended to meet their needs. One conclusion was that there would be value in developing a set of guidelines to SPECTRUM for natural scientists. It was envisaged that any guidelines would give a natural sciences interpretation of SPECTRUM, giving extra or natural science specific information where appropriate, and selecting out other material not relevant.

Now that the museum community has acquired some experience in using SPECTRUM, Louise Smith, MDA's Assistant Director, is setting up working groups to begin to look at such subject-specific guidelines to SPECTRUM. She would welcome hearing from anyone interested in contributing to this process, or with any other suggestions on the direction of SPECTRUM's future developments.

Another area where there is a growing demand for standardisation is that of terminology for the natural sciences. It is well understood that consistency and accuracy are needed in any record keeping, and that this is of particular value in any subject-specific guidelines to SPECTRUM. Whilst questions of terminology are beyond the specific remit of SPECTRUM, it is a truism that no matter how good procedures are, if you put in poor data, you can only get poor information out.

Geology curators have always been willing to share terminology sources that work, such as the classifications of minerals, rocks and fossils in *Geology and the Local Museum*. Currently GCG's terminology working group is developing

a number of guidelines and clarifications of existing sources, and others are working to produce look-up tables for their own software that they will make available once implemented. Where does MDA, with a role to promote excellence in documentation in museums, fit into this process? MDA does not have the expertise in individual subject areas, such as geology, to produce thesauri and term lists. Nor would it seek to. It can much more usefully serve the museum community by helping those with the knowledge to share their knowledge, and help make the resources produced as widely available as possible. This way of collaborative working successfully produced SPECTRUM and is the model that MDA will follow in developing terminology resources.

In all these developments, MDA is dependent on feedback from people actually using the resources at the 'dust face' in museums. Comments made at MDA's Workshop have already influenced the way SPECTRUM will be taken forward, but more views and observations are welcomed. The larger the number of individuals contributing to the process, the more closely SPECTRUM and terminology resources will meet the needs of their users. Another conduit for feedback is MDA's proposed network of SPECTRUM Advisors. These would be individuals well versed in SPECTRUM prepared to be the first point of call for others trying to get to grips with the subject. While it would be preferable to have an even geographical spread of Advisors, a full coverage of all the different subject areas in museums is more important, so that, for example, geologists know there is someone who understands their particular needs to talk to about SPECTRUM and its implementation. By being in closer touch with day-to-day users, the Advisors will be an important link in ensuring that grass roots views are heard.

So to return to the questions posed at the start, SPECTRUM is there and can work for all the varied users museums, but maybe needs more detail in some areas for some people. MDA is working to deal with these reservations by producing subject-specific guidelines to SPECTRUM, setting up a network of SPECTRUM Advisors and making available a range of terminology resources. These initiatives are all at an early stage, so if you would like to influence them or just find out more, please contact Louise Smith at MDA in Cambridge on 01223 242848.

Nick Goff, MDA Regional Outreach Manager

### **New MDA labelling video**

MDA Outreach has teamed up with Leicester University's department of Museum Studies to produce a training video: 'Missing links? Labelling and marking museum objects'. It demonstrates recommended techniques for a variety of collections, and explains the importance of proper labelling and

marking as the link between objects and the information that makes them significant.

As well as using the video in the free training courses run by its Regional Outreach Managers, MDA plans to make 100 copies freely available to Area Museum Councils, County Museums Officers, local curators' groups and other museum networks. The video, and notes which accompany it, should prove a useful resource whenever and wherever suitable training opportunities arise (for example, during an advisory visit to a voluntary museums, as part of a local group meeting etc).

This initiative is part of MDA Outreach's strategy to make its existing training go further by giving the museum community tools to deliver appropriate training in response to local needs. For further information about the video and how to borrow it, please contact: Nick Goff, Regional Outreach Manager for the West and Wales, tel 01934 627878; Kevin Gosling, Regional Outreach manager for the east, tel 01799 5550008; or MDA Main Office in Cambridge, tel 01223 242848.

#### Newish publications

*Environmental curatorship* by Peter Davis. 1995, 208pp. Leicester University Press, ISBN 0 7185 1548 X, £39.50

*Northumbrian rocks and landscape. A field guide* edited by Colin Scrutton. 1995, 216pp. Yorkshire Geological Society/Ellenbank Press, ISBN 1 873551 11 8, £9.99

*Discovering dinosaurs* by Mark A Norell, Eugene S Gaffney and Lowell Dingus. 1995, xx + 204pp. Little, Brown and Co, ISBN 0 316 87564 3, £22.50.

*The rise of fishes: 500 million years of evolution* by John A Long. 1995, 223pp. John Hopkins University Press, ISBN 0 8018 4992 6, \$49.95

*Tectonic evolution of the British Isles* by W R Fitches, J Craig and R Mathews. 1995, c600pp. Chapman and Hall, ISBN 0 412 38730 1, c£35.00

*Mammoths* by Adrian Lister and Paul Bahn. 1995, 168pp. Boxtree, ISBN 0 7522 1604 X, £17.99

*Fossil Grove* by Alastair Gunning. 1995. Glasgow Museums, ISBN 0 902752 52 9, £2.50

*Care and conservation of palaeontological material* by Chris Collins. 1995, 160pp. Butterworth-Heinemann, ISBN 0 7506 1742 X, £50.00.

*Touring exhibitions* by M Sixsmith. 1995. Butterworth-Heinemann, ISBN 0 7506 2518 X, £35.00.

*Evaluation of museum and gallery displays* edited by P Sudbury and T Russell. 1995. Liverpool University Press, ISBN 0 8532 0285, £10.00

*How the earth works* by Peter Brannlund. 1995, 96pp. Geological Society, ISBN 1 897799 51 9, £9.50

*The geologist's directory 1996* edited by G Reeves. 1995, 512pp. Geological Society, ISBN 1 897799 37 3, £80.00

*Milestones in geology* edited by M J Le Bas. 1995, 272pp. Geological Society, ISBN 1 897799 24 1, £30.00

*Field geology of the British Jurassic* edited by P D Taylor. 1995, 288pp. Geological Society, ISBN 1 897799 41 1, £65.00

*Geology and scenery of Dorset* by Eric Bird. 1995, 208pp. Ex Libris Press, ISBN 0 948578 72 6, £8.95

*Geological data management* edited by J R A Giles. 1995, 185pp. Geological Society Special Publication No 97, ISBN 1 897799 34 X, £55.00

*A study of fossil vertebrate types in the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. Taxonomic, systematic and historical perspectives* by Earle E Spamer, Edward Daeschler and L Gay Vostreys-Shapiro. 1995, 434pp. Academy of Natural Sciences Special Publication 16, \$38.00 (+ \$5.00 airmail postage and handling) from Scientific Publications, Academy of Natural Sciences, 1900 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia PA 19103-1195.

*Catalogue of type, figured and cited fossils in the National Museum of Wales. Supplement 1971-1994* by R M Owens and M G Bassett. 1995, 250pp. National Museum of Wales, Geological Series No 12, ISBN 0 7200 0422 5, £32.00. In addition to 205 pages of data on type specimens, this A4 catalogue includes 32 plates and figures illustrating all of the primary types plus a summary of the museum's major fossil collections and an index of donors. As a special offer to GCG members, copies of the 1972 type catalogue and 3 other museum publications are being offered free with each purchase. For further details and an order form, contact Valerie Deisler, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF1 3NP tel 01222 397951 ext 282, fax 01222 667332.

*Discovering geology. Fossil focus: ammonites* is the first in a new series of popular publications produced by the British Geological Survey. The folded A3 cards are priced at £1.95 + 50p post and packing; or to the retail trade in packs of 10 at 35% discount from the Sales Desk, British Geological Survey, Keyworth, Nottingham NG12 5GG tel 0115 936 3241, fax 0115 936 3488.

### *World of stones*

*World of stones* is a recent Russian journal devoted to the mineralogy of Russia. It is published quarterly in English, with a full supplementary text in Russian. The journal covers matters of interest to the advanced mineral collector and those interested in the history of Russian mineralogy and mineral production. Recent papers describe the mineralogical collection of the Mining Museum of St Petersburg Mining Institute, and the mineralogy and mining history of individual mining regions. A year's subscription (4 issues) is 74DM. Contact: L Schneider, BRD Hemmersweiher 5, 66386 St Ingbert, Germany.

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**29-30 November 1995**  
**BOOKING FORM**

- I will be attending the seminar/AGM on 29 November  
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 for the following number of passengers .....
- or* I need a lift for the field trip .....
- I would like details of local accommodation .....

From: Name..... Title.....

Address.....

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Please return this section to with a cheque made payable to Geological Curators' Group, to GCG, c/o Kate Andrew, Ludlow Museum, Old Street, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1NW by 17 November 1995.

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## Building Stones Collection Database Working Group

### Questionnaire

The Building Stones Collection Database Working Group (formed after the Sedgwick Building Stone seminar in September 1993) is keen to discover the size and potential of building and decorative stone collections in the museums of the British Isles.

If you have a collection of such material in your museum, please answer the following questions and return this form to Paul Ensom at the Yorkshire Museum. Please do not be put off by the potential to give detail. If you have only a little information, this will be better than none at all. If you can give detail this would be most welcome. Thank you for your help.

1. Name and address of museum:
  
2. Contact name:
  
3. Is there a collection of building stones (either discrete or integrated)?    yes / no
  
- 3a. How big is the collection? (If exact figure is not known, please estimate):  
    <100 ....    100-500 ....    500-1000 ....    >1000 .....
  
4. Is there a collection of decorative stones (either discrete or integrated)?    yes / no
  
- 4a. How big is the collection? (If exact figure is not known, please estimate):  
    <100 ....    100-500 ....    500-1000 ....    >1000 ....
  
5. Is it catalogued?    yes / no
  
- 5a. If yes is it:    manual ....    computer ....
  
- 5b. If no catalogue exists, are good quality data available in some other form?    yes / no
  
6. Is the catalogue available?    yes / no
  
7. Provenance of collection:    Local ....,    Regional ....,    UK ....,    Br. Isles ....,  
    European ....,    Asian ....,    Other ....
  
8. If appropriate, may we hold the information you have provided on computer?    yes / no
  
9. May we pass on information about your collection to others?    yes / no

Please give any additional information which you think may be helpful, eg if there are thin sections with some/all specimens.

**Please return this form to Paul Ensom, Keeper of Geology, The Yorkshire Museum, Museum Gardens, York YO1 2DR.**