



COPROLITE

DROPPINGS
FROM THE
GEOLOGICAL
CURATORS
GROUP

Coprolite is compiled by Tom Sharpe, National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 3NP (tel 01222 573265, fax 01222 667332) and produced by Monica Price, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, 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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From GCG Chairman

It certainly does not seem a year ago since our Ludlow meeting when I took up the reins of GCG, and I am beginning to think that retiring Chairman, Paul Ensom, was right when he said that the three years fly past too quickly! I can echo Paul's opening remarks of his Chairman's report for 1995 in that support for museums and collections has once again occupied much of committee's time during 1996. We have given strong support to Bristol Museum which once again faces severe staff cuts and serious threats to its unique collections (we are still awaiting the final outcome, and fear bad news); to the Ludlow Museum for their proposed regional geology centre in Ludlow; and to the Isle of Wight Museum for its proposed dinosaur museum to be funded by the Millennium Commission. We have been consulted by the Essex Field Club over site recording in the county following the demise of the Passmore Edwards Museum; by the Russell Coates Museum in Bournemouth over the resiting of its famous Geological Terrace; and by Dorset County Council over its World Heritage Site Proposal. We have been

asked to comment by the Northern Ireland Department of Education on their draft document *A review of major museums in northern Ireland*; by the BGS on their *Prior Options Review*; and by English Nature on their draft *Position Statement on Fossil Collecting*.

Committee has also been concerned with developments in NSGSD and is pleased to record the future liaison with BGS over site recording. We are grateful to Tony Morgan, who has agreed to take over from John Cooper as GCG representative on The Geological Society Conservation Committee and thank John for his many years service to this cause. Mick Stanley will continue to liaise with NSGSD on behalf of GCG.

The minor constitutional changes, reported by Paul Ensom in his Chairman's Report last year were implemented at an EGM held in Liverpool on 26 June; these have been accepted by The Geological Society and The Charity Commission and, in brief, include the creation of the post of Editor of the Newsletter and the replacement of the Publicity Officer by a Programme Secretary. The new Constitution has been published in *Geological Curator* 6, 6.

Seminar meetings have been held at Newcastle-upon-Tyne (30 April) on **Training**; at Liverpool (26 June) on **New technologies**; and at Harrogate, during the MA Conference (30 September), on **Fossil collecting in Yorkshire**. The Newcastle meeting, held jointly with BCG, looked at the need for professionalism in the training of museum personnel, and heard talks from Leicester University, Cambridge University, the Natural History Museum, the MA., MTI and SEMS and was attended by approximately 40 members. The Liverpool meeting was the official launch of GCG's Home Pages on the Internet, and heard presentations on new technologies by John Faithful, Phil Phillips, the Natural History Museum, Alpha Collections Management Ltd, and UK Consortium for CAL. The meeting was attended by approximately 25 members who enjoyed the fascinating demonstrations by the commercial companies present. The half day meeting at Harrogate, during the MA's 102nd Conference, was another success, attended by 21 members, who learned about the development of collecting in Yorkshire, from such experts as Simon Knell, Rosemary Roden, Kate Andrews and Paul Ensom. Profound thanks are due to Andy Newman, Wendy Simkiss, Paul Ensom and their helpers, for arranging these three very successful meetings.

The Group also had input into the **2nd World Congress on the Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections**, held in Cambridge from 20-24 August and organised by Chris Collins. This major international success was attended by over 300 delegates and we are grateful to Chris for his mammoth efforts in this regard and to Wendy Simkiss who acted as GCG representative on the Organising Committee.

Wendy is also acting as GCG representative to the Technical Committee for GeoScience '98, the new biennial event being organised by The Geological Society in Keele from 14-18 April 1998. GCG will be contributing to one of the five major symposia at this meeting on **Geology and Society; getting the message across**. I attended the first meeting of the Technical Committee on 11 November.

As Chairman, I am also a member of The Geological Society Specialist Groups Committee, and attended the annual meeting at Burlington House on 17 March, which discussed, among other issues, the future tenancy of Burlington House, financial arrangements of specialist groups, and the role of women in geology (groups were encouraged to invite women speakers and, GCG take note, to encourage woman Chairmen). We were also asked to encourage more of our members to become Fellows of the Geological Society, something which members might like to consider.

My first year in office has been eased by the hard working committee which met three times during the year; on 25 January at Burlington House, and on 9 May and 5 September at Manchester Museum. Thanks are due in many quarters; first to Tom Sharpe for his commitment to producing our new display boards to replace the well-travelled originals. I am sure Tom's efforts will be appreciated by generations of GCG members for many years to come. Secondly, to our Recorder, John Faithful, for his faithful dedication to setting up and editing the GCG's Internet pages, now one of the prime sites for web surfers. Third to Monica Price and Tom Sharpe again for their continued editorship of our popular newsletter, *Coprolite*, and to Clinton Burhouse Ltd. for their continued sponsorship. Also to Steve Thompson for his dedication for both GCG and BCG in producing the Orphan Collections Report which will eventually be published in *Geological Curator*. Also to our Treasurer, Andy Newman, for his zealous keeping of the accounts and for exploring the hidden mysteries of the Charity Commissioners and Geological Society regulations for any possible benefit to the Group's finances. Patrick Wyse Jackson is to be congratulated again for the conception and safe delivery of *Geological Curator* 6, 5, 6. Last, but of course not least, I must thank the secretaries, John Crossling and Mandy Edwards, for their efficiency and willingness throughout to ease my indoctrination this year.

GCG 1997 subscriptions and membership list

Subscriptions for 1997 are now due. These remain at last year's levels: £10.00 for a UK Personal Subscription, £12.00 for overseas. Please complete and sign the form on the centre pages and send it with your payment by **31 March 1997** to the Treasurer at the address on the form.

Officers and Committee 1997

Chairman: John Nudds, The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester M13 9PL tel 0161 275 2634, fax 0161 275 2676, e-mail john.nudds@man.ac.uk

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Committee: Colin Reid, Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, St James' Road, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 1HU tel 01384 453574, fax 01384 453576.

Wendy Simkiss, Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN tel 0151 478 4212, fax 0151 478 4390

Alistair Bowden, Clitheroe Castle Museum, Clitheroe, Lancashire BB7 1BA tel/fax 01200 24635

New members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Peter C. Tandy**, Natural History Museum; **Laura Fehily**, University College Cork; **Geraldine O'Connor**, University College Cork.

Have you got ideas for GCG Seminars?

Having just taken over the role of Programme Secretary I find myself in the position of wondering what sort of issues you, as members, would like to discuss at GCG seminars. The group has debated a large variety of topics since its inception, and it is interesting to follow the changing nature of subjects which have come under our scrutiny as the role of the geological curator has continued to develop and change towards the new millennium. Since I have fortunately inherited an already set 1997 programme (thanks Mandy) it would seem to be an appropriate time to ask what you would like to see the group focus its attention on in future meetings.

When was the last time GCG visited your museum, or have we ever visited? What's happening in your area? Are there any interesting projects? What issues are, or have become, important to you as someone who works in the field of geology in museums? If you have got a good idea (or even a half-baked one) don't just think about it drop me a line or give me a ring. I would very much welcome your thoughts. I look forward to hearing from you.

Steve McLean, Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT Tel 0191 222 7418
e-mail: s.g.mclean@newcastle.ac.uk

Documenting a new address for MDA...

The Museum Documentation Association has a new address: MDA, Jupiter House, Station Road, Cambridge CB1 2JD tel 01223 315760, fax 01223 362521, e-mail mda@mdocassn.demon.co.uk, home page <http://www.open.gov.uk/mdocassn/index.htm>. David Dawson (Outreach Manager for the South) tel/fax 01608 645576, e-mail david@mdaserv.demon.co.uk. Maggie Pedley (Outreach Manager for the North) tel/fax 01274 680581, e-mail maggie@mdaoutr.demon.co.uk.

LASSI for all

The Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC) are in the process of handing over the technical products from the Larger Scale Systems Initiative (LASSI) Project to the Museum Documentation Association (MDA). The documents which constitute the technical products reflect the experience and expertise invested in the LASSI Project resulting in the LASSI Operational Requirement. As such they will prove useful to any museum wishing to specify their own collections management system and are to be made available to any registered museum; in the first instance by appointment at the MDA offices in Cambridge. The MDA are planning to publish the Operational Requirement both in hard copy and on the World Wide Web.

A number of larger museums have already chosen to take advantage of the LASSI framework agreement and thereby purchase the project's chosen collections management system, MultiMIMSY, at a competitive price. Now all museums will be able to benefit from the input to the project by using the technical products to help evaluate an existing system or to specify a new one. Neither need museums worry that the technical jargon will be a barrier to them using the LASSI products; staff at the MDA will be on hand for their interpretation. Louise Smith, Assistant Director of the MDA said: 'We are delighted that the MGC and the LASSI Consortium, made up for the most part of national and larger local authority museums, have shown their commitment to the museum community as a whole by sharing the benefits of this important work.'

Cornwall Geological Museum loses specimen

During the period mid-June 1996 to the end of September 1996 a specimen of clinoclase from Wheal Unity, Gwinear, Cornwall went missing from the Curatorial Area of the Museum.

The specimen measures 45 x 37 x 30 mm and consists of an aggregation of dark blue spheres of clinoclase on an iron-stained quartz matrix. It comes from the University of Cambridge's Carne Collection (no.C107 (4)) and is labelled with a prussian blue ellipse about 4mmx3mm with the hand-written number 345; and the number '107', about 10mm high painted in dark green-blue paint, possibly varnished over.

The specimen is of considerable importance and any assistance given towards its return would be most appreciated. Its return would be under amnesty. Please contact the Curator of the Cornwall Geological Museum, Alverton, Penzance, Cornwall TR18 2QR, or telephone the Museum on 01736 332400. Alternatively you can contact Steve Laurie at the Sedgwick Museum, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EQ tel 10223 333456, fax 01223 333450, e-mail sal11@esc.cam.ac.uk.

Forthcoming meetings and seminars

16-17 April 1997 Torquay Museum, Torquay, Devon

GCG Seminar and fieldtrip: Quaternary collections

Quaternary collections often seem to cross the boundary between geology and archaeology and this is also reflected in today's programme, with speakers coming from both the geological and archaeological communities. This seminar will look at wide ranging issues such as excavation, documentation, research, conservation and the definition of terms in common use, combined with a look into some of the most important and historically interesting Quaternary collections in this country.

Wednesday 16 April : Seminar

- 10.30 Registration and Coffee.
- 11.00 Welcome to Torquay Museum : Mike Bishop.
- 11.10 Quaternary Mammal Collections at Taunton Museum. Dr Andy Carrant, NHM, London.
- 11.30 Reconstructing an early 19th Century cave fossil assemblage: Case study of Kirkdale Cave. Patrick Boylan, City University, London.
- 12.00 Current ideas on conservation of sub-fossil bones. Adrian Doyle, NHM, London.
- 12.30 Lunch and tour of collections with Mike Bishop.
- 14.00 Archaeology and Palaeontology of Cresswell Crags : Museum collections and sources. Dr Roger Jacobi, Quaternary Section, British Museum.
- 14.30 Augustus Wollaston Franks and the Stone Age Collections at the British Museum. Gill Cook, Quaternary Section, British Museum.
- 15.00 Go boil your bones! Andy Carrant, NHM, London.
- 15.30 The Stanton Harcourt Mammoth Excavation, Oxfordshire. Kate Scott, Baden-Powell Quaternary Research Centre, Oxford.
- 16.00 Tea and Meeting Ends. Arrangements for Field Trip.

Thursday 17 April : Field Trip

Kent's Cavern : Professor Alan Straw will lead a trip to Kent's Cavern. Meet at the Cavern car park at 9.30 a.m. Kent's Cavern was excavated over many years by William Pengelly, who developed his own method of excavation and recording finds in three dimensions. A vast amount of faunal material was recovered, which found its way into many British museums, and the associated artefacts form one of the best records of Palaeolithic from anywhere in Europe. This trip will focus on the history of the cavern and the history of its excavation. There will be an admission fee of £3.25 to Kent's Cavern, payable on the day.

Please return the booking form on centre pages to Mike Bishop, Torquay Museum, 539 Babbacombe Road, Torquay, TQ1 1HG by 7 April 1997.

26 June 1997 Hull

GCG Seminar: Disability and geological displays

Museum curators are becoming more and more concerned about equal access for all visitors. The subject is particularly relevant at the moment considering the introduction of the new Disability Discrimination Act in 1996 and its further planned implementation in 1997. Geological curators and educationists have, at their fingertips, an excellent collection resource for people with disabilities. How can this be further exploited? This seminar will look at ways in which museums are tackling disability issues and, in particular, examine case studies of how geology displays can be made more physically and intellectually accessible

Contact: Heather Rayfield tel 01482 613902

20-26 July 1997 Liege, Belgium

20th International Congress of History of Science: Development and cultural influence of geological sciences in an age of technological and industrial expansion.

The two main themes of the conference, for which papers are invited, will be Geology and mining in the Old and New Worlds, and Use of non-written sources for the history of geological sciences.

Contact: XXth International Congress of History of Science, Centre d'Histoire des Sciences et des Techniques, 15 Avenue des Tilleuls, B-4000 Liege, Belgium. Tel 32 041 66 94 79, fax 32 041 66 95 47, e-mail chstulg@vml.ulg.ac.be

30 July - 9 August 1997 Geological Society, London and Royal Society, Edinburgh

Celebration of the bicentenaries of Charles Lyell and James Hutton

The first part of the conference in London (30 July - 3 August) will be concerned with the achievements and impacts of the work of Lyell. The second part (5 - 9 August) in Edinburgh will deal with the past, present and future relevance of Hutton's theories. The lectures will include contributors of international renown and will be interspersed by periods of discussion. The will be followed by visits to classical sites linked with Hutton and Lyell. The programme is being arranged to catch the interest of all, whether geologists or historians.

Contact: Lyell/Hutton Conference Office, Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W 1V 0UJ tel 0171 434 9944, fax 0171 439 8975.

15-21 September 1997 City Hall and National Museum of Wales, Cardiff Museums Association 103rd Annual Conference

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

October 1997 Maidstone Museum, Maidstone, Kent

GCG Seminar: Lost worlds, iguanodons and the European perspective

It is hoped that this meeting will include an excursion to Brussels.

Contact: Ed Jarzembowski, Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery, St Faith's Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1LH, tel 01622 754497

27 November 1997 Natural History Museum, London

GCG Seminar and AGM: New developments at the Natural History Museum

Contact: Andrew Clarke tel 0171 938 9282 or Cally Hall 0171 938 8869

Exhibitions

Dinosaurs - a new generation 9 May - 31 August 1997 Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast

Tracking dinosaurs 15 March - 31 August 1997 National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

Dinosaurs then and now 22 February-5 April 1997 Dundee Museum

12 April -30 August 1997 Dudley Museum

Rock and fossil roadshow 8 February - 11 May 1997 Cliffe Castle Museum,
Keighley, West Yorkshire

Mineral, Fossil and Gem Shows

8-9 March 1997 **NEW!** York Rock 'n' Gem Show, **York Racecourse**, York.
10.00-17.00. Admission adults £2.00, OAPs £1.50, children (8-16 years) £1.00.

Contact: HD Promotions Tel: 01628 21697 or 01494 450504, Fax: 01494
450245.

16 March 1997 Oxford Spring Mineral and Fossil Show The Exeter Hall, Oxford
Road, Kidlington (just north of Oxford) 10.00-16.30.

The Oxford University Museum of Natural History will be open as usual (12.00-
16.00) with a special bus service between the Museum and Show. There is car
parking at Exeter Hall, but if you are arriving by public transport (bus services
from London are cheap and very frequent), come to the Museum to catch the show
bus up to Kidlington.

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

19-20 April 1997 Rock 'n' Gem Show, **Kempton Park Racecourse**, Sunbury
on Thames, Middlesex 10.00-17.00. Admission adults £2.00, OAPs £1.50, children
(8-16 years) £1.00.

Contact: HD Promotions Tel: 01628 21697 or 01494 450504, Fax: 01494
450245.

Dinosaurs - a new generation

The world's first dinosaur theme park opened in 1854 - and the famous concrete
beasts created by anatomist Richard Owen and sculptor Alfred Waterhouse
Hawkins can still be seen in Crystal Palace, south London. Owen and Hawkins
brought their vision of the Mesozoic world to life by combining cutting-edge
scientific research with the skills and aesthetic input of the sculptor. This
tradition of science-art collaboration continues today in the shape of computer-
controlled animatronic exhibits, such as those produced by Kokoro Dinosaurs
and Dinamation.

In 1997 some of Kokoro's dinosaurs are coming to Ireland for the first time. The
Ulster Museum's exhibition *Dinosaurs - A New Generation* will create a vivid
picture of dinosaur family life, from eggs and babies through to adulthood. This
'family' theme reflects an area of intense current research. Advances in field and
laboratory techniques have revolutionised our understanding of dinosaur
ontology; recent discoveries have revealed information about egg-laying, nest

behaviour and early development - exemplified in the exhibition by the extraordinary *Maiasaura*. Other groups of adult and baby dinosaurs in display will include *Triceratops*, *Stegosaurus*, *Apatosaurus* and *Tyrannosaurus*. And thanks to The Dinosaur Egg and Embryo Project, preparations of real fossil eggs from China will also be on view.

At the local level, direct evidence for dinosaurs in Ireland is limited to a few bone fragments from the Lias of east Antrim. These will be displayed in the exhibition alongside a more complete juvenile *Scelidosaurus* from the Lias of Charmouth near Lyme Regis (kindly lent by the Dorset-based collectors responsible for its recent discovery and preparation).

A selection of John Sibbick's dinosaur paintings relating particularly to the 'family life' theme will also feature in the exhibition. An ambitious Children's Activity Area and a DinoStore packed with dinosaur books, souvenirs and gifts completes the visitor experience.

Dinosaurs: A new Generation opens at the Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast, on Friday 9 May and runs until Sunday 31 August 1997. For enquiries relating to the exhibition content and organisation please contact Peter Crowther (Keeper of Geology) direct on 01232 383132.

**International Conference:
Regularities of Evolution of the Earth Crust
St Petersburg, Russia, 15-18 October 1996**

The conference was billed as 'International' but in the event there were two participants from the UK, one from Germany, two from China (who spoke Russian) and the remainder of the delegates were Russian speaking. This naturally presented a problem and we had to rely on non-professional translators and friends. However, bearing in mind that the aim of the visit was to cement partnership and develop contacts it seemed more appropriate to meet with small groups and individuals than to try to attend all the lecture sessions. Many of the oral presentations were supported by posters and it was much easier to communicate on a one-to-one basis during the breaks for poster demonstrations. The papers ranged across the entire geological spectrum but the main ones of interest to me were those on crystallography, education and mineralogical/geological museums.

The conference began with an official welcome. All the delegates wore outdoor coats and looked hard at my new suit. I discovered why after sitting shivering for a short time. Introductions and planning meetings took place over steaming cups of coffee. The afternoon was spent on a walking tour of the city and a visit to the St Peter and St Paul Fortress (cathedral, prison and museum). That evening the Conference Dinner turned out to be a well-lubricated buffet and this was followed by a small party in the crystallography laboratory. By that time I was unsure of

what alcohol was being consumed but it seemed to be customary to produce bottles of clear liquid from your briefcase.

A tour of the mineralogy museum and discussions in the geology department began the next day's proceedings. Although missing the lectures, the poster sessions gave plenty of opportunity to talk to delegates about their research.

October 17th was the big day - my presentation in the Section 'New approaches in teaching geological sciences'. This had been a slick delivery when I was practising, it became less so when each sentence was translated and very ragged when I had condensed it to fit into the time slot. However, 'Mineral museums in Society - the Camborne School of Mines' seemed to be appreciated, especially the scenic views of Cornwall. My thesis that mineral museums in depressed old mining areas had a duty to put something back into the society from which mining companies had taken so much, actually appeared to me rather ironic seeing the conditions of the Russian museums. But the first question afterwards was 'How many staff do you have at Camborne?' My answer of 'Me, part-time' produced a great deal of wonder and sympathy. The fact that I have central heating, running water (cold and hot), electricity, telephone/fax/email (all working) did not seem to compensate for not having a huge team of researchers and technicians. The other papers in the session which were translated for us included 'Role of geological museums in education and development of science', 'Geological memorials in Tatarstan Republic - new museum objects', 'Palaeontology and geological museums in XXIst century', 'History of museum collecting by Kazan geologists', several papers on work in Moscow museums and a description of the mineral museum at Tomsk Politechnical University. My partner was really bored with these as he said the only pictures were of filing cabinets showing how much information they had amassed. We were invited to a discussion with Prof Vladimir Prosorovsky and Tatyana Ivanova from the Moscow State University Museum about the history of the Earth History department and museum collection in the university. This included coffee, biscuits and sampling the best cognac. The eminent professor's office, he told us, had belonged to the cleaner in previous times.

The next day included discussions in tin mineralisation with Elena Panova and Vladimir Gavrilenko when we exchanged samples from Cornwall and Eastern Russia. There were the final sessions and closing ceremony of the conference. A visit to the Mining Institute and Museum nearly froze us once again. The staff were working in boots, coats and gloves with very primitive equipment. We were pressed to tea and cakes with the director and curatorial staff to thaw us out. We presented a Cornish tin medal to the Institute though a hot water bottle would have been more useful.

On the last day we visited the Russian Museum with Arkady and Anton Glikin and again realised how uncultured we are compared with our counterparts in Russia.

While visits to the various museums in St Petersburg were necessarily brief, the overall impression was one of hardship. The curators and scientists were struggling to keep collections intact but with no money for basic requirements such as heating and water, extremely low staff salaries and little modern equipment the future looks bleak. The University itself had minimal heating but the Mining Museum was really cold. Sulphide specimens were deteriorating and without heat in the worst of the winter there could be major problems with the building and some of the specimens and artefacts. In the Russian Universities and Institutes research seems to be of paramount importance in all departments but very little which might be likely to bring in finance from outside sources. This was brought home to us by one young graduate who had joined a company producing casts of fossils. He felt very sorry not to have continued research but was earning a good salary and had travelled to many parts of the world selling the product, a marked contrast from the senior academics who were earning about \$40 a month in research posts. I was struck by the number of women lecturers and researchers. There appeared to be at least as many women as men in the university, students as well as staff. However, the most senior figures were male. Although pensionable age seemed similar to our retired academics were welcomed on committees and in planning projects where experience was needed.

The value of this visit can be appreciated by the very warm welcome we received and the determination by everyone we met in the university to keep up the contacts, however difficult, and to meet again. We were asked to go to the next conference and if we could arrange an official meeting in Cornwall which some of the staff from Russian universities and museums might be able to find funding to attend. Because of my contacts with the Universities of Exeter and Plymouth, the mining industry, women's groups and the museums and galleries in Cornwall I have the opportunity to talk to many people and I hope raise awareness and sympathy for our colleagues in Russia. The geologists who stayed with me last year were very anxious to give lectures to students in this country and I feel this is a very valuable way of cementing relationships between two countries.

I hope to enlist support for a conference for mineralogical curators to be held in Cornwall within the next 12-18 months. In West Cornwall we have Wheal Martyn Museum, the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall and Truro Museum, St Ives Tate and Newlyn Galleries, Geevor Museum, to name just a few places to visit and a wealth of geological and mineralogically important sites. Perhaps anyone interested in organising such an event would contact me.

I wish to express my thanks to the Museums and Galleries Commission, Camborne School of Mines Trust, and Petrolab, Geological Consultants for sponsoring my attendance at this conference.

R L Atkinson, Camborne School of Mines

GCG Seminar, AGM and Field Trip Manchester, 27-28 November 1996

I had mixed emotions when, through the morning mist, I glimpsed the distinctive pinnacles of The Manchester Museum, our base for the 1996 meeting. The reasons for my mental ambiguity were three-fold: one - delight at being in Manchester, where I first tasted Indian cuisine (a lifetime ago it seems); two - the title of the seminar, *Geological models*, which in my pessimistic moments, suggested a day of yawn-inducing papers; three - the field trip down "ancient copper mines". Ancient copper mines for pity's sake !..... visions of crumbling shafts, uncharted tunnels, rising flood waters. Happily, my fears were unrealised.

The Manchester Museum Director, Tristram Besterman, opened proceedings. His welcoming address to the 38 participants was a model of punctuality, conciseness, relevance and humour. Mr Besterman outlined the history of his institution: from its roots in the literary and philosophical societies of the late 18th century Enlightenment; to its consolidation in the 19th century as a civic institution in the life of an industrial city. At this period the museum's character, as an educational resource open and free to the public, was established.

I was struck by the similarity between histories of the Manchester and Ulster Museums. Curiously, however, Manchester Museum is a university museum. This is one of those quirks of history: being rebuffed in 1862 by the Town Council in its quest for public institution status, the museum later became incorporated into Owens College, subsequently the University of Manchester. However, this was on the understanding that the new institution would continue its civic role, and understanding adhered to, so that today The Manchester Museum is known as a major public museum.

Tristram Besterman drew attention to the listed building status of Manchester Museum, which prohibits him from interfering with the museum's original showcases (providing headaches for design staff). Tristram ended his welcome with an historical roll-call of the museum's distinguished staff, which included J.W. Jackson, archaeologist, who excavated caves on the Antrim coast in the 1930s, whose daughter recently gave the Ulster Museum a fascinating time-capsule of her father's papers and photographs (still unpublished!) and then introduced John Nudds, the present Keeper of Geology who was to chair the day's proceedings.

Tablets and time-tunnels; White Watson's geological cross-sections on display at Derby Museum was the intriguing title of the first paper by Nick Moyes, Assistant Keeper of Natural History at Derby Museum. The promise of something unusual was kept when Nick began his talk by reciting geological verses, the work of Mr White Watson: sculptor, marble-worker, geological dealer, author, lecturer and minor country gentleman. (He was christened White after his mother's maiden

name.). Watson's claim to posterity's attention is his 'Tablets' - geological cross-sections executed in stone. Watson sculpted over 100 tablets illustrating the geology of his native Derbyshire, but only 14 are known to have survived. Those illustrated by Nick looked accurate. Watson recognised these basic principles; superposition of strata, that different strata have different fossils, dip and fault; concepts then new, and which were to open the door to modern geology.

I kept thinking of William Smith during Nick Moye's talk. Smith and Watson were contemporaries: both understood strata; both drew 'delineation'. But whereas Smith stands on a pedestal as 'Father of English Geology, Watson lies buried in the detritus of history. I wanted to know more about the remarkable Watson than Nick could tell in his half-hour slot, so on my return, I thumbed through Bill Sarjeant's invaluable 5-volume *Geologists and the History of Geology* bibliography and got this reference: Ford, T.D. (1960) White Watson (1760-1835) and his geological sections. *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* 71(4) pp.349-363.

Crystallography and the geometric modelling of minerals, the next talk by Peter Tandy of the Natural History Museum, took me back to an unhappy experience: my crystallography course at university. A term of Saturday morning (yes, Saturday morning) lectures filled with geometry, algebra, chemistry and long words. I did not master the subject and I shudder when I recollect these torture sessions. Peter Tandy's lecture was much gentler. Acknowledging a life-long interest in plane and solid geometry, Peter gave an historical review of the manufacture and use of mineral models, such as sets made by the German firm Krantz, ending with a mention of computer models. Models did not help me much in understanding mineralogy: they seemed to bear no relation to the real things in rocks. Crystallography remains for me an enigma. Incidentally, Peter is carrying out a survey of mineral models in UK museums. If you can help, contact him at the Department of Mineralogy, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD, for a questionnaire.

Although the title of his paper, *The use of models in museum displays*, did not specify dinosaurs, those who knew of Phil Manning's studies at Sheffield University on fossil trackways, would have guessed that he was going to talk about dinosaurs. As Phil noted, studying trackways (the petrified footprints of walking or running animals) greatly assists dinosaur reconstruction, because it helps to picture how the animal moved. This information, added to the evidence from fossil bones, aides the modelmaker in preparing a more life-like posture. And as Phil summarised: "If you're going to pay a lot of money for a model, you might as well get it right."

Dinosaur models date back to 1851, when life-size replicas of English dinosaurs were prepared for the Great Exhibition of London. Made of bricks, they today seem squat and dated. Since then, dinosaur model-making has become a small

industry, - for museums, theme parks and the movie screen. The product is of variable quality, but under the influence of experts such as Phil (who is attached to Manchester Museum's Education Department), our dinosaurs are becoming more believable. In recent years design companies, such as Dinamation and Kokoro have produced very realistic moving and howling dinosaurs which have drawn huge numbers into museums.

(I chanced this summer 1996, in the grounds of Seaforde Butterfly Farm, Co. Down, upon a very realistic *Megalosaurus* skeleton, made from scrap metal welded together.....well worth going to see.)

The lunch break allowed us to discuss the morning's diverse offerings, and allowed Sheila Gould to display her structures of minerals models: enquiries to Beevers *Miniature Model Unit*, Department of Chemistry, University of Edinburgh, West Mains Road, Edinburgh, EH9 3JJ.

Making the Earth move! Interpretation ideas in the Earth Galleries, Natural History Museum was Dr Bob Bloomfield's contribution, first thing in the afternoon. This was about the origins, planning and completion of the new earth sciences exhibition in the galleries of the old Geological Museum, (now part of the Natural History Museum). Bob, of the museum's Public Services Department, was involved, and as the project cost £12m (obtained from Lottery and sponsorship), it is understandable why this paper was advertised as the Keynote Address. Dr Bloomfield illustrated his talk with good quality slides. This is important in a lecture: murky or out-of-focus slides are worse than useless in a talk: they are a positive distraction.

I had not seen this exhibition, but knew from reports that it had a moving staircase and mythological statues. Amongst the points Bob Bloomfield made were: the exhibition was designed to be interactive and was pitched at a reading age of 14 years; most of the £12m went on unseen construction; and (blockbuster exhibition planners take note) actual building costs escalated during the project. The £12m seems to have been worth it: 'schools have warmly greeted the new galleries' and there has been 'a much bigger public reaction than we anticipated'. As Bob fielded questions on budget allocation, suitability of mythological figures and paucity of specimens on display (417!), I made a mental note to go and see this exhibition for myself.

The last session of the seminar was *Minerals and the CD-ROM media: collaborative developments by the National Museums and Galleries of Wales & the Open University*, in which speakers Richard Bevins (NMW) and Andy Tindall (OU) took a back seat. For this was an up-to-date exposition of computer technology, and our attention was focused on the screen. What we saw was a computer version of a mineralogy of Wales: statistical and visual information which could be presented, highlighted and searched rapidly. I belong to the slide-rule generation (just) and

I marvel at the cleverness of computer scientists. 'We have the technology' is a hackneyed phrase; it is important that we use this technology wisely. For the amount of information which curators can catalogue is infinite and the temptation is to play with the technology at the expense of the product.

I counted 31 present at the AGM which began just before 4.00 p.m. Most of the office-holders were re-elected unopposed; reports were accepted without dissension. Noteworthy was the *cri-de-cœur* from Patrick Wyse Jackson, editor of *The Geological Curator*: why is he receiving so few papers for publication? Is it because he lives in Dublin? (I don't think so). It is because there is no demand for such a journal? (Possibly). Any views from the membership?

Thursday 28 November: I assumed a nonchalant air on the journey through the Cheshire stockbroker belt to the 'ancient copper mines' at Alderley Edge, 12 miles south of Manchester. Although I knew I was in the safe hands of field trip organiser David Green (Keeper of Mineralogy at Manchester Museum), I was apprehensive about my first descent down a mine. However, assisted by members of Derbyshire Caving Club, who equipped us with helmets and lamps, and bolstered by my determination not to look foolish in front of my companions (about 25), I survived the one and a half hour's journey down and up.

I was glad of my helmet and lamp, as I inched through passage-ways and tunnels hewn by pick and shovel. I got the impression of an underground maze. My only misdemeanour was treading on John Nudd's fingers on a ladder between two levels! A 1750 BC shovel and Roman coins found in the mine testify to its antiquity.

Geologically, the mine is set in aeolian and fluvial sandstones of Triassic Age. I saw a ceiling of ripple-marks, slickensides in a fault plane and a variety of grain sizes and colours (yellows, reds and browns). Apart from tiny fragments of copper carbonates and a shimmering deposit of chrysocolla in running water I saw no traces of ore minerals, which explains why mining ceased in 1920. Geology, though, was not foremost in my mind. I thought of the generations of miners who laboured in appalling conditions to earn a livelihood. I can think of no more wretched occupation. I also marvelled at the members of Derbyshire Caving Club when I learned that as a hobby(!) they spend their spare hours repairing the mine system. It takes all sorts, I thought as we afterwards relaxed over lunch in the Moss Rose Inn, exchanging reminiscences and talking about the possibility of a GCG meeting in Ireland, before splitting up and returning our various ways.

Kenneth James, Ulster Museum

The Yorkshire Museum strikes a rich mineral vein

With substantial financial support from the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Yorkshire Museum has been able to purchase a scientifically and historically important collection of northern counties minerals.

In addition to the Heritage Lottery Fund's donation which underpinned the purchase, the Museum received a generous grant from the PRISM (Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material) Fund of the Museums and Galleries Commission. This grant would not have been available without the very generous matching funding provided by Amerada Hess, PERENCO, Scottish Power, Shepherd Building Group, the Yorkshire Philosophical Society and an anonymous charity. In addition to the above organisations the support of British Steel and Regional Railways Northeast Limited is gratefully acknowledged.

The collection has been purchased from Lindsay and Patricia Greenbank who had formed the collection over many years. Amongst the specimens are items of historic importance repatriated from America and other countries to which they had been exported in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There is also more recently collected material from old and new mine-workings operated by the Greenbanks and their business partners.

The 289 minerals represent many aspects of the mineral wealth of northern England and are a significant addition to our existing collection, parts of which dates back to the foundation of the Museum in 1823. The collection of specimens from Yorkshire is possibly the finest collection of such material held by a museum. The quality of the information with many of the specimens makes them especially important when viewed against the rapidly diminishing number of working mines, and the infilling and inaccessibility of many others.

The collection is composed of specimens from three areas. The first comprises the Isle of Man, the West Cumberland iron ore fields, Lake District, Caldbeck Fells and Shap Fell and has 98 specimens. The second area covers the escarpments of Cumbria and the mining dales of Cumbria, Northumberland and Durham and is represented by 122 specimens. The third area covers Cleveland, the Yorkshire Dales and Derbyshire with 69 specimens. There are 49 species of mineral represented in the collection which is especially rich in specimens of fluorite, barite and calcite.

The cost of the collection was £60,000, plus £5,900 for transport and storage units. The Heritage Lottery Fund contributed £42,700; PRISM £15,000, and £8,200 was raised locally.

Paul Ensom, Keeper of Geology, The Yorkshire Museum

Ulster's mineral and rock collections

The Ulster Museum Geology Department has finished cataloguing its collections of rocks, minerals, gemstones, building and decorative stones, meteorites and tektites. The Museum Documentation Association's Standards and Procedures have been employed throughout. The collections are computerised via GOS and MODES and partial computer print-outs are already available. Enquiries for any further information should in the first instance be directed to: Dr Rab Nawaz FGA, Curator of Mineralogy and Petrology, Department of Geology, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK, BT9 5AB. Tel. 01232 383134, fax 01232 383003.

Taxonomy strides towards 21st century Major collaborative agreement established by Europe's natural history institutions

In an unprecedented initiative, ten major taxonomic institutions in Europe have agreed to form a Consortium to realise the huge potential of their natural history collections and expertise. The aim of the Consortium of European Taxonomic Facilities (CETAF) is to promote scientific research in systematic biology and access to collections, information and expertise, by improving the efficiency of taxonomic facilities through networking and cooperation. It will benefit thousands of researchers in a variety of scientific disciplines and numerous other workers in industry, education, government, medicine, forestry and agriculture.

Primary objectives of the Consortium include databasing of collections and associated information, development of information services to aid access for scientific commercial and public use and promotion of training for systematists. An example of the type of training that can be undertaken is the MSc course developed by The Natural History Museum in collaboration with Imperial College, London. This new course entitled 'Advanced Methods in Taxonomy and Biodiversity', has attracted twenty people in its first year, four of whom are from overseas.

The founding members of CETAF are museums in Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Paris, Milan, Madrid, Berlin, Stockholm and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and The Natural History Museum, London. Each holds a very substantial part of the world's natural history collections of plants, animals and microorganisms, with significant research facilities and expertise. This collaborative agreement will create a major European scientific resource.

Other taxonomic institutions in Europe which are committed to CETAF's objectives will be able to apply to join the Consortium. The objectives and progress of CETAF will be reviewed after a period of three years.

The Oxford University Museum changes its name

The University Museum in Oxford happens to be one of five university museums in Oxford - which can be very confusing for visitors. Following a recent Review of the Museum, the University has agreed to change the Museum's name to reflect the nature of its collections; it is now to be known as 'The Oxford University Museum of Natural History'.

Newish publications

Earth's restless surface by Deirdre Janson-Smith, 1996. HMSO 60pp. ISBN 0 11 310056 6, £5.95

Agate microstructure and possible origin by Terry Moxon, 1996. Terra Publications, 106pp. ISBN 0 95285 120 2, £6.90

Minerals of Hungary by Sandor Szakall and Melinda Janosi, 1996. Herman Otto Museum, Miskolc, Topographia Mineralogia Hungariae IV, 130pp. ISBN 963 7221 78 6.

The Ambleside Rockshop

Once again we'd like to thank Clinton Burhouse of Burhouse Ltd for sponsorship of *Coprolite* during the coming year. Readers may be interested to know that the company, in addition to their wholesale business, now have a retail outlet in Ambleside, Cumbria. I chanced upon it by accident while on holiday in the area. I was standing outside, thinking the logo looked rather familiar, when I was enthusiastically informed 'you really ought to go in there, its superb!' by a customer who was just leaving. The company have managed another fine renovation of an old building (as they did for their warehouse, Quarmby Mills, in Huddersfield.), where a substantial part of the floor-space is devoted to the display of minerals and fossils, many of them 'museum-pieces' from localities worldwide. They also sell a wide range of geological specimens, ornaments and gifts. The *Rockshop* is well worth a visit if you are in the area.

Monica Price, Oxford University Museum of Natural History

Late News

Natural Science Curatorial Course

16 June - 20 June 1997

A practical introduction to working with natural science collections including collecting, recording, identification, systematics, preservation, collection care, organisation, enquiries, and so on.

At the Department of Museum Studies
University of Leicester
in association with Leicester / Leicestershire Museums
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