



DROPPINGS
FROM THE
GEOLOGICAL
CURATORS
GROUP

OPROLITE

No.6
November
1991

Coprolite is compiled by Tom Sharpe, 49 Kelston Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF4 2AG and produced by Monica Price, University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW. It will be 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.

Coprolite is sponsored by C.J.C. Burhouse Ltd of Huddersfield, wholesale distributors of minerals, gemstones, gemstone products and jewellery components.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Please note that the AGM of the Geological Curator's Group will be held at 15.30 on Wednesday 4 December 1991 at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, St.James's Road, Dudley, West Midlands.

Amanda Edwards, John Martin and Monica Price will be completing their terms of office this year. All nominations for these and any other posts on the Committee must be made by two members of the Group and must be submitted in writing to Simon Knell (Hon.Secretary), Scunthorpe Museum and Art Gallery, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe DN15 7BD, at least 21 days before the AGM. **The deadline for nominations is 12 November 1991.**

New members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: Peter F. Hopes, Bristol; Stuart Allison, St Andrews; James K. Wood, Scarborough; Angel L. Montero and Carmen Dieghez, Madrid; Sue Rainton, Scunthorpe; Jon Radley, Northwood, Middlesex; Museum of Isle of Wight Geology, Sandown.

Musical Curators

David Norman, formerly Head of Palaeontology at the Nature Conservancy Council (English Nature) has been appointed Director of the Sedgwick Museum, University of Cambridge from 1 October 1991; **Chris Collins**, Assistant Keeper of Earth

Sciences (Conservation) at Leicestershire Museums Service has been appointed Conservator at the Sedgwick Museum (his new telephone number is 0223 62522); **John Faithfull** of the Department of Geology at the University of Leicester has been appointed Curator of Mineralogy/Petrology at the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow; **Neil Clark**, formerly Public Services Manager at Glasgow Dome of Discovery, has been appointed Curator of Palaeontology at the Hunterian Museum; **Simon Howell** is the new Keeper of Mineralogy/Petrology at the Manchester Museum and takes up his post in February; **Simon Ridley**, formerly a museum studies student at Leicester University, has been appointed Cataloguer at the Manchester Museum.

Awards for Bill Sarjeant

Dr William A. S. Sarjeant of the Department of Geology, University of Saskatchewan, Canada, and a member of GCG, was honoured in 1990 by the award of the Sue Tyler Friedman Medal of the Geological Society of London for his work on the history and bibliography of the earth sciences. Since then, he has gained two further distinctions. In May 1991 he was awarded the Founders' Medal of the Society for the History of Natural History and in October 1991 he received the History of Geology Award of the Geological Society of America at its meeting in San Diego, California.

Geological Collector of the Year 1991

The Geological Collector of the Year for 1991 is **Simon Carpenter** who lives in Bristol and is a member of the Bristol Naturalists Society.

Runners up are the **Martin Family** of Lewes, Sussex who are members of the Brighton and Hove Geological Society, **Dr. J. Gordon Todd** of the Geological Society of Glasgow, and **Felix Whitham** of the Hull Geological Society.

An additional Certificate of Merit is awarded to 9 year old **Carl Durber** of the North Staffordshire Geologists' Association, being the best of the younger entrants.

Our congratulations go to all the winners. Dr. Bob Symes of the Mineralogical Department at the Natural History Museum will be presenting the award and certificates at the Geologists' Association Reunion on Saturday 2 November 1991 at University College, London. A report of the 1991 competition will appear in the next issue of *Coprolite*.

New BCG Secretary

BCG's new Secretary is Mike Graham, Townley Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Burnley, Lancashire BB11 3RQ. Tel. 0282 24213.

The Halstead Trust

The Geologists' Association has set up a trust in commemoration of the late Beverly Halstead. At the last GCG Committee meeting, it was agreed that the Group make a contribution of £100. If any member would like to make an individual donation, please send a cheque made out to the Geologists' Association at the address below, indicating that it is for the Halstead Trust: Geologists' Association, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 9AG.

Committee on the Public Understanding of Science

The Committee on the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS) was set up in 1985 by the Royal Society, the Royal Institution and the British Association for the Advancement of Science to provide a focus for a broad programme to improve public awareness of science and technology in the UK. COPUS is extending its activities with museums and other leisure institutions to promote the exchange of ideas and information and to formulate good practice aimed at the public understanding of science across a wide range of organisations. COPUS also runs a small grants scheme which has already funded a number of imaginative projects from museums and would be pleased to receive further applications. The challenges that COPUS faces are identified in a report, *COPUS looks forward - the next five years*, copies of which are available on request from Jill Nelson, COPUS Executive Committee, c/o The Royal Society, 6 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AG, tel. 071 839 5561 ext. 266.

MDA card revision

The Museum Documentation Association (MDA) is seeking to revise and clarify the MDA Card Instruction Books and, if necessary the cards themselves. To this end, MDA has asked GCG for comments on the geology cards (locality, geology specimen and mineral specimen). Existing users will already have received a questionnaire from MDA. If you have any comments you wish to make through the Group, please contact John Cooper, GCG Chairman, Booth Museum of Natural History, 194 Dyke Road, Brighton BN1 5AA Tel.0273 552586 by 4 December 1991.

Forthcoming meetings and seminars

4-5 December 1991 Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, St James's Road, Dudley.
GCG Seminar, AGM and field trip: Mining the heritage seam, a case study: promoting and conserving the geological and industrial legacy of the Black Country.

Dudley is one of the classic areas of British geology. Situated at the heart of the Black Country, its wealth of natural resources, coal, ironstone, fireclay and limestone were

all exploited to provide raw materials for the Industrial Revolution. These resources are now depleted, but the legacy of centuries of exploitation - caverns, quarries, the most important geological and palaeontological sites in the West Midlands and a unique social and economic heritage, are all being exploited today as part of the Borough's active tourism strategy.

The result is a rapid and startling transformation in the fortunes and profile of Dudley geology since GCG's last visit in 1985. The meeting will highlight these changes, in particular the successful establishment of a comprehensive geological museum service in the area, and look at some of the new developments planned as Dudley's geological collection approaches its 150th anniversary.

Wednesday 4 December, Seminar and Annual General Meeting. Banqueting Suite, Dudley Town Hall (opposite Muscum).

- 10.00 Arrival and coffee
- 10.30 Welcome. John Simpson, Chairman of Leisure Services Committee, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.
- 10.40 A geological background to planning and development in the Black Country. Dr John Powell, British Geological Survey.
- 11.20 A geological service for Dudley: recent developments and future plans. Colin Reid, Dudley Museum.
- 12.10 Conservation and the role of the regional geological society. Alan Cutler, Chairman, Black Country Geological Society.
- 12.40 The NSGSD geological sites database. Alan Clayton, British Geological Survey.
- 13.00 Lunch at Museum (complimentary) and an opportunity to view developments in Dudley Museum and the Rock and Fossil Roadshow. There will also be a demonstration of the NSGSD database and recording form produced recently by BGS.
- 14.30 Peripatetic curating in the Black Country. Rosemary Roden.
- 15.00 Discussion.
- 15.15 Tea.
- 15.30 GCG Annual General Meeting.
- 16.45 Inauguration of new Geological Gallery windows.
- 18.45 Black Country evening out: a guided tour of the sites, sounds and, of course, tastes of the Black Country.

Thursday 5 December The Geological Heritage Trail.

- 09.30 Assemble in Zoo car park for a visit to the 'Geochrom'.
- 10.20 Black Country Museum to view the Black Country mine experience, 'Into the thick'.
- 11.15 Coffee.

- 11.45 'The Singing Cavern': a narrowboat trip into the old limestone mines under Dudley's Castle Hill.
- 12.45 Lunch.
- 14.00 Field visit to Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve, the West Midlands' most important geological site and planned home of a new Geological Interpretation Centre.
- 16.00 Finish.

Please complete the booking form on page 19 and send it with payment to Colin Reid, Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, St James's Road, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 1HU (Tel. 0384 453574) by 25 November 1991.

**31 March - 2 April 1992 University of Manchester
Conserving Britain's mineralogical heritage**

Contact: Dr. D. O'Halloran, Joint Nature Conservancy Committee, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA. Tel. 0733 340345.

**April 1992 University of Sheffield
BCG/GCG Natural Science Curatorial Course**

Contact: Bob Toynton, Division of Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, 85 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield S10 2GJ. Tel. 0742 768555 ext. 4932.

14-17 May 1992 Crewe, Cheshire.

Conserving our landscape: evolving landforms and Ice Age heritage.

English Nature, Geological Society, Quaternary Research Association, British Geomorphological Research Group, Royal Geographical Society, Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland, Countryside Council for Wales.

This wide-ranging conference will consider all aspects of the conservation of landforms and Quaternary features. It will consist of a single day of presentations followed by two days of field-based studies and discussions. Subjects will include the conservation of river systems and coastal features; man-made exposures and mineral extraction sites; and upland landscapes and deposits. The legislative framework, voluntary conservation initiatives and links with wildlife and archaeological conservation will form important cross themes to the subjects listed above.

Contact: Jo Collinge on 0733 340345 extension 2322 (direct line 0733 318322).

**7-8 July 1992 Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery, Borough Road, Sunderland
GCG Seminar and Fieldtrip: Reaching for a common standard: control of terminology in geological documentation.**

Fieldtrip: English Lower Permian and Zechstein cycles of the Upper Permian.

Contact: Steve Maclean, Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery, Borough Road, Sunderland, Wearside SR1 1PP. Tel. 091 514 1235.

14 - 18 September 1992 Plymouth

Museums Association Annual Conference

Contact: The Museums Association, 34 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2SF.
Tel. 071 404 4767.

16 - 18 September 1992 University of Wales College of Cardiff.

New geology - new roles. 8th meeting of the Geological Societies of the British Isles

Contact: Zoe Moore, Department of Geology, University of Wales College of Cardiff, PO Box 914, Cardiff CF1 3YE. Tel. 0222 874000 ext. 5092.

23 - 25 September 1992 Edinburgh

Joint meeting of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the National Museums of Scotland: Volcanism and early terrestrial biotas.

Contact: Sandra McDougall, Meetings Secretary, The Royal Society of Edinburgh, 22,24 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 2PQ.

29 September 1992 Museum of St Albans, Hatfield Road, St Albans

GCG Seminar: Geology and Museum Education

Contact: Kate Pontin, Leicestershire Museums, 96 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TD. Tel. 0533 554100.

2 - 3 Dec 1992 Scunthorpe Museum and Art Gallery, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe

GCG Seminar and AGM: Fossil digs: the practicalities of fossil excavation.

Including visit to ironstone mines and other local sites.

Contact: Simon Knell, Scunthorpe Museum and Art Gallery, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, South Humberside DN15 7BD. Tel. 0724 843533 / 280444.

Exhibitions

Dawn of the Dinosaurs

Plymouth City Museum until 31 Jan 1992

The Dinosaur Roadshow

Carlisle Museum Nov - Dec 1991
Perth Museum Jan - end Apr 1992
Inverness Museum May - July 1992

M40 - Travelling through time: the geology of the M40 extension

University Museum, Oxford until end Dec 1991

Canon Grainger - magpie collector

Ulster Museum until 26 Jan 1992

Dinosaurs from China

Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt until 10 Nov 1991
Yorkshire Museum Mar - Oct 1992

The story of the earth

Geological Museum, Trinity College, Dublin until Oct 1992

Mammoths and the Ice Age

National Museum of Wales 14 Dec 1991 - 27 Sep 1992

Minerals and gemstones

National Museum of Wales 1 Nov 1991 - 31 Jan 1992

Geology in practice

Swansea Industrial and Maritime Museum 1 Nov 1991 - 4 Jan 1992

Mineral shows

Sussex Mineral Show Saturday 16 November 1991 10am - 430pm.

Clair Hall, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath. Admission 50p.

Contact: Sussex Mineral and Lapidary Society, Tel. 0444 233958.

The story of the earth at Trinity College, Dublin

The University of Dublin (Trinity College) is celebrating its 400th birthday in 1992. The Geological Museum, situated within the Geology Department which is one of the oldest in the British Isles, has been refurbished and a new exhibition *The story of the earth* opened in October 1991 and will run for a year. The exhibition serves as an introduction to geology and consists of over 20 individual displays. These include dinosaur material from Africa and eggshell from Mongolia, meteorites (including three Irish falls), zeolites from the Tertiary of Ireland, gemstones, Carboniferous 'reef' communities, fossil fish from the Eocene of Italy, and Irish industrial products. The Geological Museum is open Monday to Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm; admission free; groups by appointment (Tel. Dublin 7021477).

The fossil story at Nottingham

The Natural History Museum, Wollaton Hall, Nottingham opened a new fossil gallery on 15 June. A variety of ancient landscapes has been recreated and show scenes from life on earth during the last 400 million years. Fossils in the new display include the remains of a woolly mammoth and fossil footprints.

October launch for RockWATCH

On Wednesday 30 October Sir David Attenborough, President of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, and Dr. Eric Robinson, President of the Geologists' Association will be launching RockWATCH.

RockWATCH is a new club for young people which is being run as a parallel to the existing and highly successful WATCH Club. Last November the Geologists' Association and the WATCH Trust signed a special agreement to work together to bring RockWATCH into existence. A steering group was formed and the following have been drawing up a winning formula for RockWATCH: Diana Hawkes, Eric Robinson, Mike Harley, Susanna van Rose, Dick Moody, David Horsley and from WATCH, Mary Cornwell and Wayne Talbot.

At a special press conference at the Linnean Society, Sir David Attenborough, who has agreed to support RockWATCH, will explain to media representatives that he has always been intrigued by fossils and that geology is crucial to everyday life. Young people can now join a new club to learn about geology - RockWATCH.

RockWATCH will give all youngsters the opportunity to participate in geological activities and contribute information to geological research. The first survey involves looking at where rocks are - road cuttings, cliffs, quarries as well as in buildings and graveyards. Details from this will be fed through to Geological Record Centres for future reference. Potential members will be able to send to WATCH for a survey form which will include a return slip for membership. All existing WATCH members will receive the survey form with the November issue of the WATCHword magazine. The first issue of the *RockWATCH* magazine will be issued in March 1992.

Already many GCG members have offered to lead excursions for RockWATCH in 1992. Diana Hawkes is coordinating the programme and she would very much like to hear from anyone who would like to lead an excursion, by Wednesday 4 December please. She will be coordinating other RockWATCH activities in due course so WATCH this space!

The WATCH Trust is committed to this new enterprise and have carried all the costs of the exercise so far. The Geologists' Association's Curry Fund will be contributing £2,000 by the end of the year. WATCH are confident that sponsorship will be forthcoming to enable RockWATCH to take on more ambitious activities.

If you are interested in knowing more about RockWATCH, come along to the RockWATCH stand at the Geologists' Association Reunion at University College London on Saturday 2 November or contact Diana Hawkes at Haslemere Museum, High Street, Haslemere, Surrey, GU27 2LA Tel. 0428 642112.

Newish publications

Directory of geo-analytical facilities in British universities, colleges, polytechnics and research institutions by P. J. Potts and A. G. Tindle. Whittles Publishing, Latheronwheel, Caithness, 1990. ISBN 1 870325 45 1.

Geology of Scotland edited by G. Y. Craig. 3rd edition, Geological Society, 1991. 628pp, ISBN 0 903317 63 X (hardback) 0 903317 64 8 (paperback), £65 (hardback), £29 (paperback).

Geology of England and Wales edited by P. McL. D. Duff and A. J. Smith. Scottish Academic Press, 1991. 672pp. ISBN 0 7073 0317 6. £75 (hardback), £29 (paperback).

On Methuselah's trail. Living fossils and the great extinctions by P. D. Ward. W. H. Freeman & Co., New York, 1992, xii + 212pp. ISBN 0 7167 2203 8. £14.95.

Dinosaur stamps of the world by Stuart Baldwin and Beverly Halstead. Baldwin's Books, 1991, 128pp. ISBN 0 9508063 4 X. £10.00.

Volcanoes by Susanna van Rose and Ian Mercer. 2nd edition. Natural History Museum in collaboration with Harvard University Press, 1991, 60pp. ISBN 0 565 01080 4. £5.95

Fossils. The key to the past by Richard Fortey. 2nd edition. Natural History Museum and Harvard University Press, 1991, 182pp. ISBN 0 565 01107 3 £12.95

Dinosaur studies. Commemorating the 150th anniversary of Richard Owen's Dinosauria. A special issue of *Modern Geology*, Volume 16 Parts 1 & 2, edited by L. B. Halstead. 1991, 250pp. ISBN 2 88124 833 0. £83.

Systematic biology research. Written evidence received up to 21 May 1991. House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. HL Paper 41 HMSO, London, 1991, 202pp. ISBN 0 10 404191 9. £21.60.

Conservation sourcebook, 1991 edition. The Conservation Unit, Museums and Galleries Commission. HMSO, London, 1991, 122pp. ISBN 0 11 290493 9. £11.95.

The rise of the mammals by Mike Benton. The Apple Press, 1991, 144pp. ISBN 1 85076 347 X. £12.95.

Dawn of the Dinosaurs by Mike Benton. Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, 1991, 24pp. ISBN 0 904788 09 1. £1.00

The illustrated encyclopaedia of pterosaurs by Peter Wellnhofer. Salamander Press, 1991, 192pp. £18.95

Dinosaur! by David Norman. Boxtree Ltd, London, in association with Granada Television, 1991, 192pp. ISBN 1 85283 128 6. £18.99.

Geology of the Manchester area by R. M. C. Eagar and F. M. Broadhurst. Geologists' Association Guide No. 7, 1991, 118pp. ISBN 0 7073 0620 5. £9.00

Outline and guide to the geology of Guernsey by R. A. Roach, C. G. Topley, M. Brown, A. M. Bland and R. S. D'Lemos. Guernsey Museum Monograph No.3, 1991, 102pp. ISBN 1 871560 02 0. £14.95.

Treballs del Museu de Geologia de Barcelona. Ajuntamenta de Barcelona, 1990, 244pp. ISSN 1130 4995.

Who's using what software for documentation where? Museum Documentation Association, 1991, 27pp. ISBN 0 905963 78 4.

Museum Studies Bibliography, 10th edition. Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 1991, 245pp. £7.00

Some thoughts about *Geological Curator*

We all appreciate the importance of a geology collection's history when it comes to curating museum material. Indeed, many would argue that ignorance of such history (by those who should have known better) has been the single most important factor in creating the crisis state of geological curation in UK museums, as highlighted by Phil Doughty's *State and status report* of 1981. So it is right and proper that series in *Geological Curator* like 'Lost and found' and 'Collections, collectors and museums of note' feature prominently in the journal's content. I am, however, becoming increasingly concerned that this aspect of the Group's collective interests is coming to dominate almost exclusively the papers being submitted to me as Editor.

In my view, one of the great strengths of *Geological Curator* has been its ability to combine 'collections research' topics with the more 'nuts and bolts' business of day-to-day collections management. Its pages have in the past provided a *unique* forum where problems can be aired and solutions proposed concerning exhibition techniques, producing publications, manual and computerized documentation, terminology control, storage environment and furniture, site recording and interpretation, etc., etc. I would like it to remain so, but we can only publish from the submissions received - and in the last couple of years these have been almost exclusively related to collections research.

Now, I certainly don't want to discourage such submissions in future - particularly when the quality of material coming in remains so consistently high - but I do fear that the tendency to concentrate almost exclusively in this area may be inadvertently giving a distorted message to our readership. There has been *no* change in publications policy, which remains to encourage articles on *all* aspects of geological curation.

So let's hear about your experiences in implementing documentation systems, successes and failures in raising sponsorship for exhibitions, how you put that travelling show together, the consequences of financial pressures or management restructuring on service provision, conservation problems, preparation methods, organising an educational programme, the problems of maintaining acceptable storage environments in unsuitable buildings, etc. The Group was established so that people facing similar problems and sharing similar concerns could learn from each other's experiences. The pages of *Geological Curator* provide the means of doing just that, but only if Group members are willing to write for it.

Peter Crowther, Editor, *Geological Curator*

BCG/GCG Natural Science Curation Course University of Sheffield 14-19 April 1991

This course aimed to give a better understanding of the principles and techniques of each discipline of Natural Sciences to people who specialise in only one, to help those involved in the Museums Diploma and to provide a discussion forum with other museum professionals. It was attended by curators from various parts of the country but there was a heavy bias to Liverpool and the Natural History Museum.

We arrived on Sunday; those of us who arrived by train were treated to a lift (albeit overcrowded) to the Halls by Bob Toynton. After a meal we were straight into the theory of collections, acquisitions and just what exactly is the job of curator? Collecting policies were discussed but not in great detail. Two examples were handed out but we had no time to read them. Various examples of leaflets explaining legislation were shown and relevant legislation was discussed, e.g. what to do about donated birds egg collections.

Monday dawned dry and sunny for our fieldwork day. With the aid of various experts gleaned from the Sheffield area we set forth to the Limb Valley and later to Pinndale to geologize, botonize, entomologize, and mammalize everything in sight. We were encouraged to choose a discipline about which we knew little and also to change groups at some time during the afternoon.

The evening session focussed on the geological and entomological aspects of the day. Various ways of trapping insects were discussed as were procedures during setting and curation. Continuous numbering (i.e. when no final number is given for a collection) was discussed. Some people felt it was all right to assign a prefix and then keep adding numbers e.g. 1990./46.1-?. Others felt that an end number must be given or it would be unclear when part of a collection was missing.

Tuesday was away day. We headed for Leicester's New Walk Museum for a day studying the housing, handling, preservation and conservation of natural history specimens. An extremely interesting day was rounded off by an excellent buffet provided by Leicester with plenty of discussion on the day's topics. A bonus was the live bat brought by Jan Dawson.

Wednesday was identification day. Derek Whitely and Paul Richards of Sheffield provided an amazing display of items to identify (the oddity table provided some real surprises - a dried sperm whale eye!). The need to look carefully, examine and think about clues intrinsic in the specimen was emphasised. This was when the course participants really began to teach each other their disciplines. It was a very useful morning learning to identify almost anything you could come across in a natural science office.

We spent the rest of the day seeing RECORDER at Rotherham Museum. I was impressed with RECORDER but less so with Rotherham's application of it. I came away from Rotherham with the feeling that recording is not an end in itself. In the evening we had an 'interpretation' session in a woodland walk near the halls where people from each discipline spoke on features of interest.

Thursday was spent listening in awe to the achievements of Paul Howard's blockbuster exhibitions at the Yorkshire Museum. Kate Pontin of Leicestershire Museums talked about worksheets and we spent some time evaluating several worksheets from various museums and exhibitions. Kate emphasised laying down a set of rules for both teachers and children which would prevent many problems arising. After lunch MODES was demonstrated by Jennifer Hirsh and we discussed the benefits of a national scheme compared with those of a tailor-made program. Simon Knell finished off the course with a session on dealing with old and decaying collections. A series of questions asked us how we would assess the collection, go about any historical research, organise history files, organise the collection and what precautions we would take when moving the collection. This demonstrated the need for all the curatorial techniques we had been learning.

The week was an extremely enjoyable and informative one; however, I would have liked more practical activities on identification and preparation. There was also a disparity in the knowledge of the course participants. There were those with some

knowledge of curatorial practice and those without. There were also some group members who had very little knowledge of their subjects as they were employed on the basis of their 'A' level results straight from school. This meant that some people did not feel confident enough to participate fully in the discussions, and discussion outside the timetable was spent answering questions on basics. This highlighted the need for another, more basic course. We did, however, learn something from the week, at whatever level. It was useful, informative and good to spend a week in the company of other museum natural scientists. I would like to thank Bob Toynton and Peter Davis for all their hard work in making the week a success and all those who gave up their time to give us the benefit of their experience.

Anne Abernethy
Perth Museum and Art Gallery

**First International Symposium on the
Conservation of our Geological Heritage
Digne les Bains, Haute Provence, 11-16 June 1991**

Digne was a landmark in international earth science conservation: a meeting of 120 earth scientists from 30 countries with the sole aim of exchanging ideas to improve conservation in their own countries. All continents were represented but Western European countries predominated and there was an impressive turnout from Eastern Europe. From there came a cry for help. Hungary in particular requested copies of any popular geological or geomorphological information sheets, booklets, etc. for distribution and use by students at all levels. We've had Band Aid, Live Aid and now Geo Aid. Please send your sheets, leaflets, booklets to Mick Stanley at the address below as soon as possible and they will be forwarded to Hungary.

Space does not allow for more than a brief mention of the words spoken formally and informally during the three days of the conference and three days of field trips, but suffice to say that in typical French manner, 22 articles on the conference appeared in the local press. *Le Provençal* and *Nice-Matin* ran at least two articles each day of the previous day's discussions. That's the way to do it! 78 papers were presented in a combination of forum and concurrent sessions and these are available in Terra Abstracts Supplement 2 to *Terra Nova*, Volume 3, 1991, from Blackwells. A longer article on the Digne symposium will appear in the next issue of *Earth Science Conservation* from English Nature.

The first day, a meeting of the European Working Group on Earth Science Conservation, was spent trying to devise a statement to be adopted by the Conference at its close. What came out in English was massaged and 'corrupted' by a French

journalist and two interpreters to become the Declaration. Produced for the home (i. e. French) market, it sounds and feels better in French. The English is clumsy and unfriendly and is here produced in a colloquial version.

International declaration of the rights of the memory of the Earth

1 Just as human life is recognized as being unique, the time has come to recognize the uniqueness of the Earth.

2 The Earth supports us. We are all linked to the Earth and it is the link between us.

3 The Earth is 4.5 billion years old and the cradle of life. Its long evolution and slow rise to maturity has shaped the environment in which we live.

4 Our history and the history of the Earth are closely linked. Its origins are our origins, its history is our history and its future will be our future.

5 The Earth, the environment in which we live is different, not only from that of the past, but also from that of the future. We are but the Earth's companion with no finality, we only pass by.

6 Just as an old tree keeps all the records of its growth and life, the Earth retains memories of its past - a record inscribed both in its depths and on the surface, in the rocks and in the landscape, a record which can be read and translated.

7 We have always been aware of the need to preserve our cultural heritage. Now the time has come to protect our natural heritage, the environment. The past of the Earth is no less important than that of man. It is time that man learnt to protect, and by doing so, learnt about the past of the earth, to read this book written before man appeared: that is our geological heritage.

8 The geological heritage is shared by man and the Earth. Each person, each government is but the custodian of this heritage. Every human being should understand that the slightest depredation mutilates, destroys and leads to irreversible losses. Any form of development should respect the singularity of this heritage.

9 The participants of the 1st International Symposium on the Protection of our Geological Heritage, including over a hundred specialists from over 30 nations, urgently request all national and international authorities to take into consideration and to protect this heritage by means of all the necessary legal, financial and organizational measures.

The final episode and another cry for help came from the French host, Guy Martini, who suggested a joint exhibition to explore the folklore of fossils. It could be extended to include fakes and forgeries and would make a very interesting travelling exhibition. If you are interested in staging such an exhibition, or have fossils, fakes or forgeries to loan from your collection, please contact Mick Stanley.

Mick Stanley
Hull City Museums
83 Alfred Geller Street, Hull, HU1 1EP.

GCG at the BA

GCG Seminar: Geological collections and curation in the South West. Wednesday 28 August 1991 at Polytechnic South West, Plymouth

This seminar was a Mason Conference within the Annual Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and was attended by about 38 people.

Tristram Besterman and Mike Bishop, both from Plymouth Museum, began the day by describing the history of museum provision in Plymouth. The municipal museum came onto the scene comparatively late: a museum and art gallery were planned in 1897, but got no further than the foundation stone, and the present museum service dates from 1910. Several museums existed in Plymouth in the early 19th century, and indeed one of them, the Plymouth Athenaeum, was one of the venues of the 1841 BAAS meeting. Unfortunately, the Athenaeum's sizeable collections were destroyed in air raids a century later. Some charred Pleistocene bones do survive.

Peter Crowther, from another bomb-damaged institution, Bristol City Museum, has been acquiring collections to replace those deaccessioned by the Luftwaffe. In his clear, well-constructed paper, 'What price collecting?', he analysed the processes which must be gone through to justify the acquisition of major specimens and collections. Such acquisitions require not just the financial resources for purchase, but resources of staff time, storage or display. He set out the four areas of concern that should be addressed in any argument to justify an acquisition. Firstly, is the acquisition appropriate? Does it conform to the museum's collecting policy? Is the timing of the acquisition appropriate in relation to new storage space, display etc? This is an area of concern to curators. Secondly, does the acquisition have popular appeal? Does it represent the expectations of the visiting public? If it is not a display specimen, but is of scientific importance, is its acquisition of public benefit? This is an area of concern to the public. Thirdly, is the acquisition novel? Is it unique or internationally significant? This is an area of concern to the geological community who may referee a grant aid application, or lend support. Fourthly, what are the resource implications? This is an area of concern to the museum's governing body.

Peter then illustrated these concerns with the case histories of Bristol's recent major acquisitions: the purchase of a 25 foot long ichthyosaur and a pregnant ichthyosaur, and the donation of a reference collection of 15,000 Jurassic invertebrates by Hugh Torrens. This paper deserves a much wider audience, and I am sure that it would be welcomed by the editor of *The Geological Curator*.

One of GCG's areas of concern from its earliest days has been the state of the collections of the Bath Geology Museum. Roger Vaughan, formerly Curator at the museum, described his 18 months' work there. His main task was to compile an inventory of the collections to facilitate the transfer of the collections to new trustees. (GCG has been keeping a close eye on developments in Bath and will continue to do so until the future of the collections is assured). The most well-known collections in the museum are those of Charles Moore, but in addition, there is a medium-sized mineral collection, with many specimens dating back to the 1820s and 1830s; a large herbarium (13,000 specimens); a collection of 18,000 modern shells; a large insect collection; an ex-collection of birds (destroyed in the 1960s); ethnographical and archaeological material; and a library. The entire collection was photographed and listed on an Amstrad 1640 PC. 67,933 items were recorded, but some collections, such as tubes of fossil mammal teeth collected by Moore may contain as many as half a million specimens. The inventory was completed by Christmas 1990, the Curator's contract came to an end, and the Museum was closed.

David Hill, Geological Conservator at Bristol City Museum and the Area Council for the South West next reported on his preparation of a rhychosaur from the Middle Trias Otter Sandstone Formation in Devon. The specimen, discovered in April 1990 by a Polytechnic South West fieldtrip, was prepared for exhibition in Plymouth City Museum's *Dawn of the Dinosaurs* exhibition and will find a final resting place in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. David described the various techniques used during the 41.5 hours of preparation and the manufacture of a cradle support moulded to the contours of the underside of the specimen.

Tristram Besterman, Curator of Plymouth City Museum, then led an expedition across the road to the museum where we had an opportunity to view the exhibition *Dawn of the Dinosaurs*.

After lunch, Mike Bishop spoke on Plymouth City Museum's important mineral collections, in particular, the St Aubyn Collection. Sir John St Aubyn, whose family had mining interests in Cornwall, was MP for Truro in 1784. His collection includes a number of earlier collections, such as those of William Babington, Richard Greene of Lichfield, and the 3rd Earl of Bute. The collection was dispersed in 1834 by Isiah Deck of Cambridge and part went to the Mechanics' Institute in Devonport and from there to Plymouth Museum in 1944. Mike described the various 18th and 19th

century catalogues which exist and how he has been able to match some of these records with the Plymouth specimens.

Dawn Trehwella then reported on the more recent documentation of the Plymouth collections. This 2½ year project aims to produce a basic inventory of all of the collections: about 100,000 inventory records of about half a million specimens. In order to concentrate on the project, other museum services such as lectures, enquiries, and exhibitions were suspended.

Having spent a hot summer's day cooped up in the gloom of a lecture theatre, I couldn't face the tour of the museum stores and opted instead for the great outdoors and one of Eric Robinson's inimitable cemetery tours. From this I returned for one of the highlights of the BA meeting, a public lecture by Hugh Torrens in the reincarnated Plymouth Athenaeum. In typical fashion, Hugh did not take at face value the much-hyped claim that Richard Owen invented the word 'Dinosaur' at the Plymouth British Association meeting in 1841. None of the contemporary reports refer to it. Owen's published report was written in 1842 and it is in this that he uses the term for the first time. This was one of the most entertaining lectures I have ever heard and, in the words of GCG's Chairman, 'vintage Torrens'.

Tom Sharpe, Cardiff

**Museums and collections in the history of
mineralogy, geology and palaeontology.
INHIGEO, Dresden, 9-15 September 1991**

As Chairman of GCG, I was privileged to attend and speak at this, the 16th International Symposium of INHIGEO, the International Commission on the History of Geological Sciences. This body is constituted under the aegis of the International Unions of both Geological Sciences and the History and Philosophy of Science.

The Symposium was held at the State Museum for Mineralogy and Palaeontology of Dresden in what was East Germany, now the German state of Saxony. Some 64 delegates from 17 countries attended and 43 papers were presented. The range of subjects covered was enormous, ranging from 19th and 20th century meteorite collections, through the histories of many collections, institutes and countries, to personalities such as Werner, James Hall, Baron Sigmund Zois von Edelstein and our own Gideon Mantell. There was much to interest members of GCG and I look forward to the publication of the proceedings, an event which I will announce in these pages in due course.

Several of our members did attend: Hugh Torrens, Bob Symes, Peter Davidson and Patrick Boylan, to name just some of the British contingent. My message for the

Symposium was not therefore new to them for I briefly detailed the history of our Group, its aims, methods and achievements and attempted to persuade delegates of the valuable job we are doing. This was not just a recruitment drive (although I received one subscription from Brazil, a new member from Australia, and several promises): for the Europeans in the audience this was very much a call to arms. I proposed that a meeting of GCG be held, possibly in Brussels in September 1993, to address museum geologists across the continent with a view to approaching common problems and looking for common solutions. My belief is that some of our successes may be of value to our Euro-cousins and that much can be gained by us in the exchange. We will see.

I am grateful to the Geological Society, The British Council, Brighton Borough Council and GCG for financial support to attend this Symposium.

John A. Cooper, Chairman.

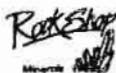
Late news! GA Award for Ron Pickford

GCG Honorary Member Ron Pickford has been awarded the first Halstead Medal of the Geologists' Association in recognition of his work on the Bath Geology Museum collections.

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