

# OPROLITE

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No. 62  
July  
2010

DROPPINGS  
FROM THE  
GEOLOGICAL  
CURATORS  
GROUP

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

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

## 2010 subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2010 are now due. If you have not yet paid, please do so now.

Cindy Howells, GCG Membership Secretary, will be invoicing members who do not pay by standing order for next year's subscription. Rates will remain the same at £15 for subscribers based in the UK. and £18, 25 Euros, or \$32 overseas, but cheques sent to her now will be gratefully accepted and will help reduce postage costs.

Please return the form on page 15 with your cheque, payable to the Geological Curators' Group, to: Cindy Howells, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP.

## **Coprolite Delays**

I'm sure many of you will have noticed that the first two editions of Coprolite this year have been delayed. Being new to this editorial business, I'm still having teething troubles working the time into my schedule. I can only apologise, and promise that normal service will be resumed.

David Craven

## **New members**

Clare Jones, Visitor Services Officer, Torquay Museum

## **Musical Curators**

Gallery Oldham have recently advertised for a replacement natural sciences curator, so I'm sure we'll soon see movement there, which is good news.

## **Exhibitions**

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

### **Mountains and Molehills: Habitats in Cheshire, 22 May—30 August 2010**

Cheshire has a very wide range of habitats, from hills, agricultural land, ancient forests, coast and estuary, to roadside verges and gardens. Each of these has its own plants and animals, and all of the biodiversity on the surface is underpinned by the soils and rocks beneath it. Biodiversity and the effects humans have had on it are very much in the news this year, as the United Nations has declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity.

### **Russian Ice Age exhibition on offer**

The Paleontological Institute in Moscow would like to offer their new rare exhibition "Ice age" (18 specimens) to British venues. The exhibition will be on display in Italy from November 2010 to April 2011, and the rental fee is 14 000 euros per month.

For any additional information, contact Galena Efimenko, Chief of Foreign Programs Department.

phone: + 7 - 495 - 333 35 79

Fax: +7 - 495 - 336 06 66

e-mail: [efimenko@maik.ru](mailto:efimenko@maik.ru)

## **Meet your Committee**

### **Helen Fothergill, Current Chairman GCG**

I spent my childhood visiting Cliffe Castle Museum almost weekly, then went to an upper school where I had to walk past the museum on my way home.... When I got the chance, without being chased out by front-of-house staff, or dragged away to "more interesting things" by my school friends, I would always make my way to the fossils or stuffed birds.

University meant a chance to get away from home, but I wasn't keen to specialise... I studied geology, physics, maths & philosophy of science at Keele.... and really wished I hadn't by the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Loved geology though... which was a bit of a surprise as I'd originally been interested in doing some archaeology. Took a year to earn some cash & then signed up for an MSc in micropalaeontology & palynology at Southampton ... loved this too, but really didn't want to work on a rig... and had really always wanted to work in a museum (secretly... as my mother wanted me to be a wealthy city lawyer!)

After numerous jobs as waitress, cleaner, chambermaid and shop assistant, I worked as a volunteer at Cliffe Castle Museum (in my home town). I was lucky enough to get a few short-term contracts for the usual stuff: cataloguing, conservation, sorting, identification and re-storage of geology, botany and zoology collections. Thank goodness the staff there put up with me... even with the drunken nights out, followed by the hangover mornings (when I'd wake up at the sound of the keyboard beeping like mad because my head was resting on it!).

I next worked at the Hancock Museum, Newcastle (sorry now Great North Museum) and at Sunderland Museum & Art Gallery, as Assistant Keeper of Geology, where obviously I was far better behaved with Steve McLean to keep me in check(!)

Then I took up the post of Keeper of Natural History at Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery, and I'm now Collections Manager in Plymouth... where I really am one of the grown-ups who have to behave.

My role on GCG committee has changed over the years... when I started I began as an "ordinary" committee member, then took on the role of Recorder and now have been Chairman for the past 3(ish) years.

I have to say that I love my job, but the more involved in museums I get, the less I seem to know about geology.... GCG helps me keep that going. I'll be handing over the "chair" at this year's AGM... so if you fancy a turn then speak up!



## **Collections at Risk: Wigan and Leigh Mining College**

An update from the report last issue. Steve Hewitt is now actively seeking homes for the collection, which is being broken up and re-housed.

Some Coal Measures material will, hopefully, stay within Wigan. But Steve has also approached Manchester, Liverpool and Bolton about taking elements of the collection. The core Geology (rock types, minerals, etc.) may still need a good home. In addition there are research materials on Coal Measure themes, especially Tonsteins and Quartzlagen. These are a range of specimens plus a quantity of thin sections. Thin sections of coal are also in store, a number of which are from the Lomax laboratories. A collection of Heavy Mineral thin sections is also in store, as is a large number of specimens from Salthill at Clitheroe.

Again, feel free to contact Steve if you have any thoughts.  
S.Hewitt@wigan-leigh.ac.uk

### **New publications**

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

**A Natural History of Time** by P Richet (Paperback - 25 May 2010)

**Triassic Life on Land: The Great Transition** by HD Sues (Hardcover - 28 May 2010)

**Sand: The Never-Ending Story** by M Welland (Paperback - 18 Jun 2010)

**Glaciers and Glaciation** by Doug Benn and David J.A. Evans (Paperback - 25 Jun 2010)

**The Forest Primeval: The Geologic History of Wood and Petrified Forests** by LJ Hickey (Paperback - 23 Jun 2010)

**Fundamentals of Geology** by A. B. Roy (Hardcover - Jun 2010)

**Gemstones** by Cally Hall (Paperback - 1 July 2010)

**Volcano: Iceland's Inferno and Earth's Most Active Volcanoes** by Ellen Prager and Marcia K McNutt (Paperback - 1 July 2010)

**Rock Chemistry (Advances in Chemistry Research)** by Basilio Macias and Fidel Guajardo (Hardcover - 1 July 2010)

**Minerals of the World** by O Johnsen (Paperback - 13 July 2010)

**Amazing Agates: Lake Superior's Banded Gemstone** by Scott Wolter (Paperback - 15 July 2010)

**The Second Jurassic Dinosaur Rush: Museums and Paleontology in America at the Turn of the Twentieth Century** by P Brinkman (Hardcover - 30 July 2010)

**Planetary Sciences** by Imke de Pater and Jack J. Lissauer (Hardcover - 31 July 2010)

**Mineralization in England and Wales (Geological Conservation Review Series)** (Hardcover - July 2010)

**Volcanoes, Earthquakes and Tsunamis: Teach Yourself** by David Rothery (Paperback - 27 Aug 2010)

**Understand Geology: Teach Yourself** by David Rothery (Paperback - 27 Aug 2010)

**Quantitative Mineral Resource Assessments: An Integrated Approach** by Donald Singer and W. David Menzie (Hardcover - Aug 2010)

**Fossils** by David Ward (Paperback - 1 Sep 2010)

**Rocks and Minerals** by Chris Pellant (Paperback - 1 Sep 2010)

**Volcanoes of the World** by L Siebert (Hardcover - 1 Sep 2010)

**Plates vs Plumes** by Gillian R. Foulger (Paperback - 3 Sep 2010)

**The Artist and the Scientists: Bringing Prehistory to Life** by Patricia Vickers-Rich, Thomas H. Rich, and Peter Trusler (Paperback - 10 Sep 2010)

**Beginner's Guide to Minerals and Rocks** by Joel D. Grice and Ole Johnsen (Hardcover & Paperback - 15 Sep 2010)

**The Planet in a Pebble: A journey into Earth's deep history** by Jan Zalasiewicz (Hardcover - Sep 2010)

## **Report - Workshop on Digital Imaging for Collections 11th May 2010 at BGS, Keyworth**

This was a fully subscribed course with 14 people from a variety of private and public institutions. The whole course was very practical and I will attempt to give a summary of the lessons we learnt though I apologise in advance if I get any technical details wrong.

### **Shutter speeds and exposure**

The first half of the day we practised taking photographs of specimens with the help of the BGS's senior photographer Paul Witney. To begin with we were advised that to achieve the best photos we should set the camera to Manual and set the ISO to 100. The cameras were set on stands and the area was lit by quite large tungsten lights, one on each side. A room without any external light is preferable. We then checked light levels using the camera's RGB histogram settings. Even though I had never seen it before all of the digital SLRs had these diagrams though they were in different places on the menu so check your manual. Step one was to focus on some white paper and take a photo; step two was to check the histogram. If the main peak was just at the right hand side then the exposure would be just right but if it was to the far right or the left then the photo would be over or under exposed respectively. If a photo is overexposed it is almost impossible to recover it in *Photoshop* later. To correct for this the shutter speed needs to be changed (using a wheel on these cameras). Written out fully these are normally in fractions of a second, i.e. 1/2, 1/4, 1/8 etc but on the camera it tends to be written as 2, 4, 8 and could be confused with the longer speeds of 1, 2, 4 seconds which may be written with a dash in front. These two



steps are repeated until the histogram shows the peak just near the right of the graph. Some cameras also had a display that flashed on the overexposed parts of the photo.

### **Aperture and depth of field.**

The aperture is the size of the hole, is the f number of the camera, and is used to change the depth of field on a photo. f1.4 is a big hole for a small depth of field. f45 is a small hole for a large depth of field. We practised taking photos of some 3D objects with a scale bar. To maximise the field of view in focus it is best to focus about 1/3 down the specimen. Then, alter the aperture until the both the top and bottom are in focus in the resulting photo. (For each change in aperture the exposure needs to be checked and the shutter speed altered as detailed above.) This does mean that for a large depth of field what you see looking down the camera is not what you get in the photo as it should all be in focus in the photo. This is because the aperture doesn't actually change until the moment the photo is taken. On some cameras there is a black button that when pushed opens the aperture to the set position and allows you to see the depth of field. Another way of getting the scale bar in focus if your specimen is flat but thick is simply to raise it up to the same level on some plasticine.

### **Side lighting and colours**

Some very flat fossils are best lit from the side. In this set up the light was placed quite some distance away at a 10 o'clock position which is the convention. To further change the shadows you can use a hand held white box, paper or some aluminium foil to reflect light back onto the specimen and lighten dark areas by hand, preferable to adding another light. The official colour strips used were Kodak step wedge cards - Q13 for grey.

### **Manipulating the data**

The image manipulation program *GIMP* was used for this session as it is available freely on the internet. It is similar in style to *Photoshop* but requires some practise and I am not going into all the details here. By going to Colours and selecting levels we could see the RGB histograms for our photos and were able to alter them manually to match the standard described above thus improving the exposure of the photo. This is preferable to using the Auto tool which though often produces a nice picture can alter the colours too much from reality. We also used the Clone tool to remove small spots. This tool is a brush that can be set to the colour of an area nearby and then copies that area to your new area and covers up the offending spot. We also looked at cropping out scale bars, resizing the photo, and adding text. Finally *GIMP* has an intelligent scissor tool that helps find the edge of a specimen, so that it can be cut out and placed on a black background.

### **Organising the data**

The final session was on how to organise your digital library. There is a lot of information available on standards at [jiscdigitalmedia.ac.uk](http://jiscdigitalmedia.ac.uk) and also at [dublincore.org](http://dublincore.org). There are many different database packages depending on whether

you want sophistication or simple file organisation. One interesting point was on the types of data you might store in your database. If your photo is of a specimen do you simply store details about the image (in which case the computer itself might be able to do this for you), or do you also attach details about the object as well, possibly duplicating data elsewhere? We finished the day with a look at BGS's very large database of images called *Geoscenic* which is worth taking a look at on <http://geoscenic.bgs.ac.uk/>

A final thanks to all the staff at BGS for organising a very informative course, where I could ask all the stupid camera questions I needed. I have now found the histogram on my own camera! A special thanks to Sue Martin for organising the meet up in the pub the night before.

Helen Kerbey

### **Forthcoming GCG seminars and workshops**

*Check our website [www.geocurator.org](http://www.geocurator.org) for updates to our seminar programme*

If there are any events you think would be of interest to GCG members, please let us know.

#### **Third International Palaeontological Congress**

#### **GCG Seminar: Symposium on collecting, curation and conservation of palaeontological collections**

28 June–3 July 2010, Imperial College/Natural History Museum, London

This GCG seminar will take place within the third meeting of the IPC which is being held at Imperial College and the Natural History Museum, London.

IPC is a major international meeting held once every 4 years under the auspices of the International Palaeontological Association. The meeting provides a showcase for all that is exciting and new in the fields of palaeontology and palaeobiology. IPC3 in 2010 is hosted by the Palaeontological Association and partner organizations.

The full meeting programme will comprise field trips, plenary lectures, workshops, contributed talks and posters, and thematic symposia. A conference dinner will be held in the Central Hall of the Natural History Museum. For more information go to [www.ipc3.org](http://www.ipc3.org)

Contact: Dr Sarah Long, Department of Palaeontology, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD tel 0207 942 5558 email [s.long@nhm.ac.uk](mailto:s.long@nhm.ac.uk)

#### **GCG Seminar: 200 years of West Country Sea Dragons**

23-24 July 2010, Strode Theatre, Street, Somerset

Following on from the highly successful PalAss review seminar 'Sea Dragons of Avalon', GCG have teamed up with three of the meeting organisers to run a similar



event to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Thomas Hawkins, the eccentric collector of Street and Lyme Regis marine reptiles.

It is anticipated that the meeting will take place on Friday 23 July 2010 followed by a field excursion on Saturday 24 to some of the modern Lias quarries in the Street area. The meeting will focus on Thomas Hawkins, his collections, legacy, and modern collecting. Topics will include current locations and state of Hawkins's specimens, including issues of acquisition, mounting methods and conservation as well as restoration/forgery. We will investigate Hawkins's life and work, his contemporaries, and Hawkins's (metaphorical) heirs – the modern collectors, preparators and curators, as well as site conservation.

Contact: Dr Leslie Noë, Curator of Natural Science, Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum, Millennium Point, Curzon Street, Birmingham B4 7XG  
email Leslie.Noë@thinktank.ac tel 0121 202 2327 fax 0121 202 2337

### **GCG Workshop and Seminar jointly with SVPCA and SPPC**

Late September 2010, Cambridge

### **GCG Seminar and 37<sup>th</sup> AGM. 7 – 8 December 2010**

**The new Ulster Museum: record visitor figures, awards and vanishing curators**

**Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB, Northern Ireland**

The Ulster Museum re-opened in October 2009 following a three year closure and a £17.2m redevelopment.

Since then the museum has received public acclaim, attracted over 400,000 visitors, won the Museums & Heritage Award for Excellence in the 'Permanent Exhibition' category and been placed amongst the four short-listed institutions in the running for The Art Fund Prize 2010. That's the good news. The down side is that the museum's curators have been moved to offices situated 9 miles from the museum, the collections have been re-housed to an industrial estate 6 miles distant from the curators and curator numbers continue to shrink, to a level that would lead a biologist to classify the Ulster Museum curators 'an endangered species'.

In the seminar, former and current Ulster Museum staff will recount the history of geology in the museum, describe the recent redevelopment and its out-workings and outline plans for the future. A geology teacher will give a user's experience. The relationship between museum management and curatorship will also be raised.

The meeting fee is £15.00 and includes tea breaks and lunch. There will be a tour of the museum's Collections Store. The programme of speakers will be available in



autumn 2010.

For further information and expressions of interest contact: Kenneth James, National Museums Northern Ireland, 153 Bangor Road, Cultra, County Down BT18 0EU

tel 02890 395243 fax 02890 395004 (FAO K James) email  
kenneth.james@nmni.com

### **Forthcoming Meetings—Other Bodies**

#### **William Smith Meeting 2010—Landscapes into Rock**

21-23 September 2010, Geological Society, Burlington House, London

The aim of this meeting is to bring together geoscientists from different sub-disciplines to address the problem of the interactions between erosional and depositional landscapes, sediment routing systems and the building of stratigraphy. By studying these interactions we gain a better understanding of the dynamics of the coupling between exhumation, erosion, transport and deposition of sediment in source to sink systems, and an enhanced ability to invert stratigraphy for forcing mechanisms.

Contact Alys Hilbourne [alys.hilbourne@geolsoc.org.uk](mailto:alys.hilbourne@geolsoc.org.uk) for information.

#### **Fossil, mineral and gem shows Apr-Sept 2010**

Shows run 10.00-5.00 on the Saturday, 10.00-4.00 on the Sunday. There is a small admission fee to pay on the door. Full details for all shows can be found at [www.rockngem.co.uk/events](http://www.rockngem.co.uk/events)

#### **7th and 8th August 2010**

Kempton Park Racecourse, Staines Road East (A308), Sunbury-on-Thames, West London

#### **14th and 15th August 2010**

Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, Mid Wales

#### **11th and 12th September 2010**

Farnham Maltings, Bridge Square, Farnham, Surrey

#### **18th and 19th September 2010**

Newton Abbot Racecourse, Newton Abbot, Devon

#### **25th and 26th September 2010**

Newark Showground, Winthorpe, Newark, Notts

#### **2nd and 3rd October 2010**

Hatfield House, Great North Road, Hatfield, Herts

## Geological Curators Group web news

[www.geocurator.org](http://www.geocurator.org)

The website continues to be regularly updated with jobs, meetings, and other important news. It's been getting hits from all over the world recently, so word is obviously spreading of the value of our site.

### GCG Committee 2010

Chair:	Helen Fothergill, Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery
Secretary:	David Gelsthorpe, The Manchester Museum
Treasurer:	John Nudds, The University of Manchester
Programme Secretary:	Steve McLean, Great North Museum, Newcastle
Minutes Secretary:	Tony Morgan, World Museum Liverpool
Recorder:	Mike Howe, British Geological Survey, Keyworth
Journal Editor:	Matthew Parkes, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin
Newsletter Editor:	David Craven, Renaissance North West, Manchester
Webmaster:	Hannah Chalk, University of Manchester
Committee Members:	Jeff Liston, Hunterian Museum, Glasgow Mark Evans, New Walk Museum, Leicester
Membership Secretary:	Cindy Howells, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff
NatSCA Representative:	Leslie Noe, Thinktank, Birmingham
ICON Representative:	Adrian Doyle, Museum of London
Co-opted member:	Tom Sharpe, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

### GCG Mailing List

If you haven't already, can I urge you to sign up for the GCG JISCMail list? It's an excellent way to share the latest news, jobs and developments. It's also the best possible font of knowledge for your questions. A simple email is sent out to all members, and the answers come flooding back!

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

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Geological Society of London  
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**BOOKING FORM**  
**7th - 8th December 2010**  
**GCG Seminar and 37th AGM**  
**Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB, Northern Ireland**

I would like to attend the meeting on 7th - 8th December 2010†

I would like details of local accommodation

I enclose payment for £15 (includes tea & coffee, and buffet lunch). Cheques should be made payable to "Geological Curators Group"

Any special dietary or other requirements.....

Title..... Name.....

Address.....

.....

Postcode.....

Telephone.....e-mail.....

Booking forms should be sent to Kenneth James, National Museums Northern Ireland, 153 Bangor Road, Cultra, County Down BT18 0EU

✂.....

**GCG Personal Subscription 2010**

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

Title.....Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

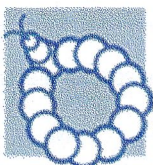
Telephone.....e-mail.....

Please return this form with payment to Cindy Howells, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP

\*delete as applicable

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Contact Clinton on: 07765231855