



DROPPINGS  
FROM THE  
GEOLOGICAL  
CURATORS  
GROUP

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

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

## 2011 Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2011 are due from 1st Jan 2011, and I will be invoicing members after the New Year. If you do not receive an invoice then you may have already paid, or may have a standing order set up. Subscription rates will remain the same as last year, and cheques should be made payable to GCG.

If you wish to pay by Standing Order, forms are available on our website. Please send any advance payments to Cindy Howells, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NP.

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

## Notice of Annual General Meeting

Please note that the 37th AGM of the Geological Curators' Group will be held at the Ulster Museum, Belfast (NMNI, 153 Bangor Road, Cultra, County Down, BT18 0EU North) on Tuesday 07 December 2010 at 1615.

### **Nominations for the following posts are welcome and encouraged:**

Chairman  
Secretary  
Minutes secretary  
Programme secretary  
Treasurer  
Recorder (projects, collections at risk etc.)  
Journal editor (Geological Curator)  
Newsletter editor (Coprolite)  
2 x Ordinary committee members (2 years, no fixed role, some project work)

Other posts such as Membership secretary and Web officer are currently co-opted posts.

**We have particular need for 2 new ordinary members.** These posts are ideal for anyone who isn't sure being on a committee is for them! No major commitment, see how the committee operates, find out more about running the GCG.

Nominations must be made by two members of the Group and submitted in writing to David Gelsthorpe ([david.gelsthorpe@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:david.gelsthorpe@manchester.ac.uk)) Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL (Tel. 0161 306 1601) by **Monday 15 November 2010**.

The Committee would encourage anyone who has an interest in becoming involved in GCG to consider submitting a nomination for a post on committee. If you are struggling to find nominators, or are trying to decide whether committee is for you, please contact any member of the current committee who will be happy to help and advise.

There are 4 committee meetings each year usually held in January, May, September and the AGM in December. At least one meeting, usually in January, is held at the Geological Society, Burlington House, London. Other meetings are held wherever is most convenient to the make-up of the committee. (Recently Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff). Travel expenses for committee members can be reimbursed if required, but we would hope that your employer would support you allowing you to attend during work time. The work involved in committee posts varies depending on the role, from attending meetings only to substantial involvement for posts such as journal editor.

## **Proposed changes to the constitution**

The committee is considering a number of changes to the constitution of the GCG and will plan to present them at the 2011 AGM. The following changes have been discussed and we would be interested to hear of any other suggestions for changes.

### **Current suggestions:**

Establish Membership secretary and Web officer as full committee posts, rather than co-opted posts.

Change Recorder to Collections officer, with a remit to monitor and support collections at risk.

Change the arrangement of ordinary committee member posts (for a maximum of 2 years post of office) from 4 posts, 2 in year one & 2 in year two to run for 2 years each; to 3 posts, each to run for a maximum period of 3 years serving in 3 year cycles.

The full, published constitution can be found on the GCG web page at [www.geocurator.org/com/GCG%20Constitution.pdf](http://www.geocurator.org/com/GCG%20Constitution.pdf)

## **Brighton Medal**

At the AGM in Belfast on 7 December, as out-going chairman of GCG, I will have the honour of presenting the 8<sup>th</sup> Brighton Medal to Philip Doughty. The Brighton Medal was inaugurated in 1992 with the aims of recognising the work of Bertie Brighton, curator of the Sedgwick Museum, Cambridge from 1931-1968, and acknowledging the importance of good curation in advancing geological science.

Philip Doughty, a founder member of the GCG and Ulster Museum's first keeper of geology, has been instrumental in altering the museum world and the general public to the importance and variety of geology, geo-conservation and geological collections in the UK & Ireland. He produced the ground breaking survey and report "The State & Status of Geology in UK Museums" between 1979 and 1981, which I had the daunting task, as GCG recorder, of attempting to repeat (even with the advantages of email & e-forms the job was far better done the first time round!). He went on to be Chairman of GCG between December 1983 and December 1986. Since then he has been far from quiet and has taken up the flag for geo-conservation through a number of groups and popular geo-science publications such as ES2k (Earth Science 2000). He can now be regularly encountered leading guided walks promoting geo-conservation.

I hope that many of Phil's colleagues and friends can attend the meeting in Belfast.

Helen Fothergill, GCG Chairman

**GCG Seminar and 37<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting will take place in the Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB, Northern Ireland, Tuesday 7 – Wednesday 8 December 2010.**

**Theme of Seminar: new Ulster Museum: record visitor figures, awards and vanishing curators**

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

In the year since then the museum has received public acclaim, attracted 600,000 visitors, won the £100,000 Art Fund Prize for museums and galleries, the Museums & Heritage Award for Excellence in the Permanent Exhibition category, a Sandford Award for the quality of educational services, a Community Benefit award from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and awards from the Chartered Institute of Marketing. 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 'endangered species' level.

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 be raised. There will be tours of the museum's galleries, which as well as the sciences, includes antiquities, ethnography, art and history displays, including 'The 'Troubles' gallery which has attracted both praise and criticism. There will be a visit to the museum's Collections Store and conservation facilities.

## **Programme**

### **Tuesday 7 December**

1030 Arrival and coffee.

1100 Sinead McCartan, Head of Collections Research and Interpretation, National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI), welcomes delegates to the Ulster Museum

1105 Dr Peter Crowther, Head of Natural Sciences, U.M. *The Ulster Museum Redevelopment Project.*

1200 Dominic Sore. *The Ulster Museum Redevelopment Project – a designer's view.*

1220 Pamela Green, Market Research and Planning Manager, NMNI. *Rock solid marketing attracting record visitor numbers.*

1240 Hot buffet lunch: chicken breast with tomato, bacon, tarragon and white wine sauce or char grilled vegetable lasagne (V)

- 1400 Mr Philip Doughty, first Keeper of Geology, U.M. and founder member of GCG. *Collections, Curators and Crises.*
- 1420 Dr Mike Simms, Curator of Palaeontology, U.M. *Deep Time.*
- 1440 Kenneth James, Curator (Geology), U.M. *Minerals, mileage, Mimsy, management, merger and missing museum assistants.*
- 1500 Fiona Baird, Learning Officer, U.M. *Hands On — Setting up a Discovery Centre.*
- 1520 Mrs Karen Parks, Geology teacher, Methodist College Belfast. *A teacher's view of the Ulster Museum.*
- 1540 Siobhan Stephenson, Head of Collections Care, U.M. *The new Resource Centre.*
- 1600 Tea.
- 1615 GCG 37<sup>th</sup> AGM
- 1700 Wine Reception, courtesy of NMNI.
- 1730 Tours of Ulster Museum galleries.
- 1900 Close of formal proceedings.
- 2000 Meal in a local restaurant, payable on evening, price range £7 to £12. Please indicate on the booking form if you want to join the party.

### **Wednesday 8 December**

- 1000 Delegates meet at front of Ulster Museum for further tours of the galleries.
- 1200 Assemble at museum entrance for lunch at Local Pub (payable on the day).
- 1345 Visit to Museum Collections Store Road (transport provided).
- 1530 Return to Ulster Museum, meeting ends.

Meeting fee: £20 or €24 (includes tea/coffee and lunch on 7 Dec and taxis on 8 Dec. (Note: this is an increase on previously advertised fee)

To book your place please complete form on page 15 and return it, with your payment to Kenneth James, National Museums Northern Ireland, 153 Bangor Road, Cultra, County Down BT18 0EU **by 19 November.**

If any queries, contact Kenneth James at tel. 02890 395243, or email [kenneth.james@nmni.com](mailto:kenneth.james@nmni.com)

For updates to seminar programme and further information check the GCG website [www.geocurator.org](http://www.geocurator.org).

For information about travel, accommodation and sight-seeing in Belfast visit [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com) and [www.gotobelfast.com](http://www.gotobelfast.com).

For information about the Ulster Museum visit [www.nmni.com](http://www.nmni.com).

Note: the Ulster museum is closed to the public on Mondays and there is limited parking around the museum.

to finish the original work in the Stainmore Trough !) Following the award of my PhD in 1975, I stayed in lovely Durham for 2 more years as a post-doc research assistant, working with Tony on the Rookhope Deep Borehole Project, which had earlier proved the existence of the Weardale Granite. My job was to identify, catalogue and curate over 3,000 specimens from the borehole in a mammoth work eventually published in 1996. At this time I also curated the fossils collections of the University Extra-Mural Department and the College of St Hild and St Bede.

In 1977 I was awarded an Irish Government post-doctoral Research Fellowship at the idyllic Trinity College Dublin to work on Irish Carboniferous coral faunas. Here I joined Tim Marchant (Carb forams), Andrew Scott (Coal Measure plants) and Derek Siveter (Lower Palaeozoic trilobites) in a very happy little Department, run by that most gentle of gentlemen, Charles Hepworth Holland, with jovial George Sevastopulo spearheading a major re-mapping of the Irish Lower Carboniferous. At the end of the 3 year fellowship, I took over from Veronica Burns as Curator of the Geological Museum of TCD, where a younger (and slimmer) Patrick Wyse Jackson was my first volunteer ! Six catalogues of the type and figured collection were published during my 8 years in post, and in 1988 I sailed back across the Irish Sea to take up the Geology Keepership at Manchester (University) Museum, replacing the venerable R.M.C (Michael) Eagar, who had been in post since 1945 !

Manchester Museum was a highly regarded institution and all the staff were working furiously on NWCRU as the north-west's section of FENSCORE. (At this time I first joined GCG committee, replacing Mike Taylor as Recorder in 1989, a post I held for 6 years before becoming Chairman in 1995.) The Earth Science Review was in full swing, and on David Price's tragic death in 1991 I was made secretary of the ESR working party on museums and collections, chaired by Oxford's Jim Kennedy. After huge battles we eventually won significant funding from the Universities Funding Council to establish five 'Earth Science Regional Collection Centres' at Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow.

Manchester Museum was awarded a capital grant of £67,000 and a recurrent grant of £100,000 p.a. which was to cover the cost of my salary and two new posts in the Museum's Department of Geology. The capital grant paid for a total refit of the Museum's Geology Department –we had brand new vertebrate and invertebrate stores with Bruynzeel roller racking, new mineral and petrology stores, a large-specimen store, a type and figured store, a dedicated Eagar Room to house his valuable and irreplaceable collection of non-marine bivalves, a fully fitted library, rock-cutting room, preparation lab, research room with microscopes and computers for visiting scientists, and extensive office space for myself, David Green, our new Keeper of Mineralogy, and Simon Riley, our new Cataloguer. The new Collection Centre was opened in 1992 by Professor Jack Zussman and we operated happily for 10 years with a band of about 20 volunteers all working one day each week. We got huge amounts done in those years, including moving all the storage off the galleries for the first time ever, the publication of type and figured catalogues (the first since J.W. Jackson – Eagar's predecessor), and the

establishment of computerised databases for minerals and fossils. Sadly almost all of this was blitzed during the 2002 lottery-funded refurbishment, and all that now remains of the original Earth Science Collection Centre is the Vertebrate Store and a somewhat reduced Invert Store. (The architects put cladding on the walls, and then realized the roller racking wouldn't fit !)

My GCG highlights during this time include the 1994 editorship of the *Directory of British Geological Museums*, published as a Geological Society Miscellaneous Paper, and conceived by GCG Chairman John Cooper. Also during my chairmanship GCG began its annual pilgrimage to foreign shores with the Brussels visit of 1997. Also in 1997 Bill Pettitt and I edited the acclaimed *Value and valuation of Natural Science Collections*, another Geol Soc publication, being the proceedings of a GCG/BGC international conference organised by the Manchester Keepers in 1995, just about the last thing we did before the dark days began.

One good thing, however, to come out of the 2002 lottery refit was the redesign of the old 'Stratigraphy Gallery', which still retained some cases untouched since before Michael Eagar's days (i.e. pre WWII if not WWI !). The London-based gallery designers, who had never previously worked on a geology gallery, were allowed rather more power than I would have liked, but we ended up with not too bad a result, although their insistence on mounting every single specimen on a vertical panel using wrought-iron supports has proved to be as foolish as we warned, and some specimens have suffered (i.e. fallen off ! What is wrong with a horizontal shelf ?)

Pride of place in the gallery went to 'Percy' (a complete plesiosaur, found by Fred Broadhurst and Geoff Potts in 1960 – perhaps the best one found in the UK during the 20<sup>th</sup> century), and to 'April', a *Tenontosaurus* dinosaur, the most complete specimen ever found, purchased with a lottery grant for a snip at \$100,000. Sadly, 'April' was removed from display in 2004 to be replaced by (yet another) plastic version of 'Stan' the very scary *T.rex*, and now lies in storage.

Having worked tirelessly and single-handedly on this gallery design for 18 months, as had all the other Keepers, we were told, just three months after the official opening, that our services were no longer required ! A staff restructuring culled all of the Keeper posts and replaced them with the downgraded post of Curator. Several Keepers took early retirement (I was too young), others left on health grounds (I was too fit), two remained as Curators, and two more (myself included) were given academic lecturing posts in the University.

So now unfortunately I no longer have a collection to curate, but I am still a curator at heart and remain a member of GCG in the certain knowledge that one day the tide will turn and museums will remember their true *raison d'être* and will value their collections once more.

## Geology News

### **Hugh Miller's Cottage saved**

AN ANONYMOUS £600,000 donation has helped secure the future of one of Scotland's oldest houses. The birthplace of geologist Hugh Miller in Cromarty, now run as a museum, faced closure last year and was forced to cut staff and opening hours to save money.

Having been given a stay of execution by the National Trust for Scotland, the donation represents a major boost for the property. The gift will create a special Middleton Fund to be used solely to pay for staffing the museum and keeping it open. A trust spokeswoman said: "This is a significant donation which will go a long way to secure the future of this important property."

The trust said it would shortly reinstate a full-time curator/manager, and restore seven-day opening during the summer season from next year. It also said it will continue to work closely with the Friends of Hugh Miller support group to ensure new initiatives and programmes can be developed.

<http://www.hughmiller.org/>

### **A more recent fossil...**

A FOSSIL hunter got a little more than he bargained for when coastal erosion exposed a mine cart dating back 150 years. The remnant from Purbeck's shale mining days has been exposed 50ft up cliffs near to Rope Lake Head, to the east of Kimmeridge Bay.

### **5 foot long Ichthyosaur skull rebuilt in kitchen**

Having spent 2 years patiently accumulating the parts of a large ichthyosaur skull, Mike Harrison of Lyme Regis, Dorset has now restored the specimen on his kitchen table. He has spoken to Charmouth Heritage Centre, and the specimen will be heading to a museum in the near future.

### **Pick up a giant penguin**

Palaeontologists working in Peru have uncovered the remains of a 36 million year old fossil penguin, *Inkayacu paracasensis*. At nearly five feet tall, Inkayacu would have been much bigger than the modern Emperor Penguin which reaches a maximum of four feet.

Preserved pigment cells show the bird would have had reddish-brown markings.



## **Tyrannosaurus rex was a cannibal**

The discovery of tooth marks in T.rex bones has suggested the famous dinosaur was cannibalistic.

Researchers from Yale University, led by Nick Longrich, examined bones in eight different museums in reaching their conclusion. While there is a chance the marks came from battles between rivals, the position and frequency of the bites is more suggestive of predation.

## **Collections review uncovers new sponge species**

A Renaissance and Effective Collections funded collections review in the North West of England has discovered a species of fossil sponge that appears to be new to science. Dr Lucy Muir found the specimen in the collections of Keswick Museum, and it is now being examined by researchers.

## **Torquay Rock Walk**

A £3m revamp of Torquay's Royal Terrace Gardens, known as the Rock Walk, was recently completed. Work has been done to stabilise the cliffs, light the route, and provide interpretation. The project should make the area safe and accessible for many years to come.

<http://rockwalktorquay.blogspot.com/>

## **Gems for the Smithsonian**

To mark the 100th anniversary of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, donors have given four remarkable examples of gemstones and jewellery, including the Cullinan Blue Diamond Necklace, The Whitney Alexanderite, and the Tourmaline Triplets.

## **Paris museum of geology and mineralogy being redeveloped**

The Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, having redeveloped its zoology museum, has now closed the museum of geology and mineralogy for a similar redevelopment. The gallery will re-open in 2011.

Meanwhile, the museum currently has an excellent exhibition called Dans l'Homme des Dinosaures, which has some exceptional specimens on display. The exhibition not only looks at Mesozoic life, but also at the struggle and later flourish of mammals in the Cenozoic. Anyone visiting Paris before February should check it out. If you can find an ICON card, it's free.

## Geological Curators Group web news

www.geocurator.org

The website continues to grow, and the number of visitors reflects this. Keep an eye on the site for all the latest news, jobs, and events.

### 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 McLéan, 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<br>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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**BOOKING FORM**  
**GCG Seminar and 37<sup>th</sup> AGM 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010**  
**Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB, Northern Ireland**

I would like to attend the meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010  
I would like to join group for evening meal on 7<sup>th</sup> Dec (payable on night)  
I would like to join tour of Collections Store on 8<sup>th</sup> Dec  
I would like details of local accommodation  
Any special dietary or other requirements .....

I enclose payment for £20 (or €24) (includes tea/coffee, lunch and taxis on 8<sup>th</sup> Dec.) Cheques should be made payable to "Geological Curators Group".

Title . . . . . Name . . . . .  
Address . . . . .  
. . . . .  
Postcode . . . . .  
Telephone . . . . .  
e-mail . . . . .

Booking forms should be sent to:

Kenneth James, Curator(Geology), NMNI, 153 Bangor Road, Cultra, Holywood, Co. Down BT18 0EU **by 19 November**

✕.....

**GCG Personal Subscription 2011**

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

Title.....Name.....  
Address.....  
.....Postcode.....  
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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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