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Title: Obituary: R. H. Harris

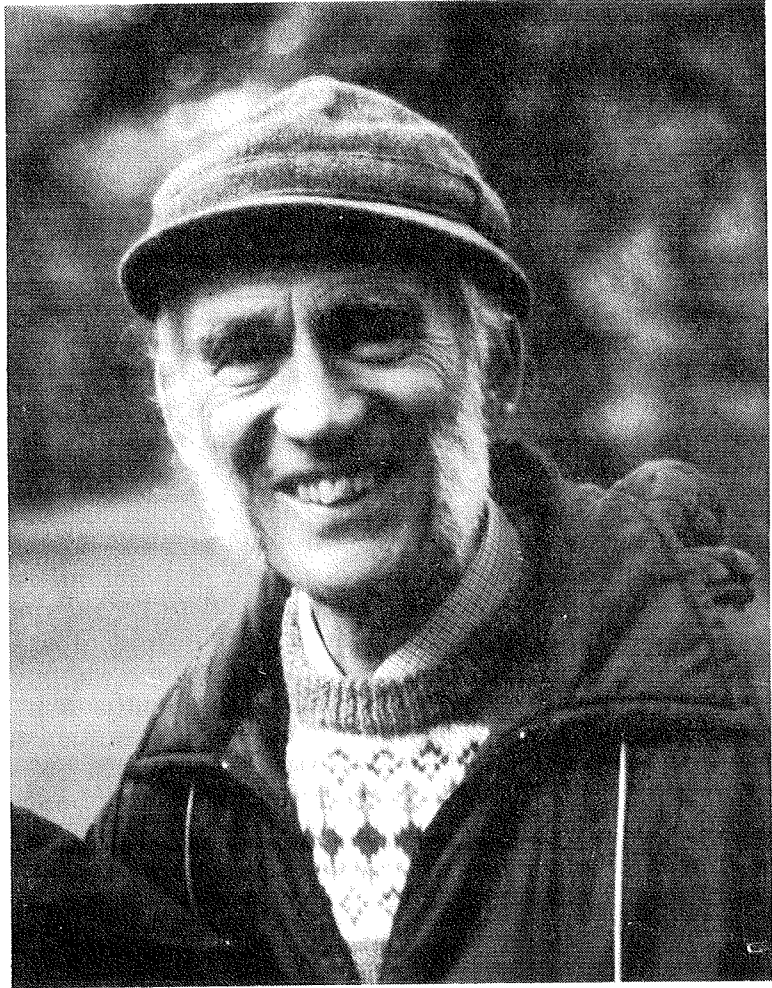
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*R. H. Harris*

## **R.H. Harris (1919-1987)**

Reg Harris FMA, Hon.FLS, MIBiol., founder member of the Biology Curators Group, was born in 1919 over a jeweller's shop in Central London. He joined the staff of E. Gerrard, Royal College Street, straight from school, and moved to the Wellcome Museum (just over the road from his home) in 1936. The war years saw him in the Navy, in the Laboratory at the Royal Naval Hospital Haslar from 1939-1941, aboard HMS *Collinwood* from 1941-1943 as Sick Berth Petty Officer in the Sick Quarter Laboratory, and attached to the Royal Netherlands Navy, on the Hospital Ship HMHC *Ophir*, Eastern Fleet, in 1943.

Returning to the Wellcome Museum in 1946, he moved on after a year to the Zoology Department of University College, London, as a teaching technician. Appointed Curator of the Museum of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy a year later, a post the current Professor relinquished in Reg's favour, he realised the vision of a former Professor, J.P. Hill., "for a trained zoologist who was also a good technician". His experimentation at this time produced new ways of preparing teaching specimens. He was invited to teach Biology in 1950 at the Working Mens College where he had been a student himself gaining the Foster Memorial Prize for Bacteriology and the Fotheringham Prize for Geology.

The move to the Natural History Museum at South Kensington as an Experimental Officer in 1956 gave Reg the time and the scope to develop further experimentation in new ways of specimen preparation. The work for which he is best known began in 1960 after a talk with Dr Meryman (a Naval Physicist from Washington) who described a method of drying entire biological samples in their natural shape and proportions without distortion. A subsequent meeting with Dr Roland Hamer of the Smithsonian Institution led to the technique of freeze drying being developed simultaneously in the USA and the UK. Together with Edwards High Vacuum Ltd the highly successful EF2 machine was evolved. An arrangement of spring flowers buried in Westminster Abbey in 1977 as part of the Queen's Jubilee Year Celebrations, were freeze dried by Reg.

Work on other applications of freeze drying, for stereoscan electron microscopy, marine archaeology, marine zooplankton, and geological applications, together with critical point drying, followed. He was deeply involved with the problems of bio-deterioration and very keen that this work should be continued by others. During his time at the Natural History Museum he taught Biology and museum technique at evening courses for the Science Laboratory Technicians Course at Paddington Technical College.

'Retirement' in 1980 saw him moving to Alderney for four years to become Curator of the Alderney Museum. On his return to the mainland he was still involved in promoting research into bio-deterioration, and took part in seminars as part of the Leicester Museums Studies Course.

A very private man devoted to his family, Reg had a keen sense of humour and was a fountain of knowledge. He had the rare gift of communicating his love of and boundless enthusiasm for everything connected with Natural History and Geology, which enriched the lives of countless students, technicians and many others. His death on 2nd March, 1987, left a gap which has yet to be filled.

Rosina Down

## List of Publications by Reg Harris

- 1950 (with H C Bartle) Marco resin embedding. *Bull.sci.Tech.Ass.* **1 (10)** March.
- 1951 The use of enzymes in the osteological preparation of the Emperor Penguin. *Mus. J.* **51**, 97.
- 1952 Demonstration of the supporting tissue in the manus of the Indian Elephant by the use of a specific stain. *Mus. J.* **52 (8)**: 206.
- 1957 (with C A Wright and D Claugher) Paper Chromatography in taxonomic work. *Nature* **180**, 1489.
- 1958 The extraction of bones from bird pellets. *Essex Nat.* **30 (2)**, 129
- 1959 Small vertebrate skeletons. *Mus. J.* **58 (10)**, 223-224.
- 1960 Alizarine transparencies. *Mus. J.* **60 (4)**, 99-101.
- 1964 Vacuum dehydration and freeze drying of entire biological specimens. *Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist.* **Ser.13, VII**: 65-74.
- 1964 Freeze drying - a Natural History Preservation Technique. *Trans Mus. Ass. Grp.* **No.3** (Sept.)
- 1965 Simple technique for embedding and supporting of delicate biological specimens. *Nature* **208 (5006)**, 199.
- 1965 Vakuum - und Gefriertrocknung ganzer biologischer Objekte. *Der Preparator Jahrgang II. Heft 4*. (translation of Vacuum dehydration and freeze drying 1964).
- 1967 [Editor] Aliverti, Ciccioli and Laudi. *Secrets of the Microscope*.
- 1968 A new apparatus for freeze drying whole biological specimens. *Med. Biol. Ill.* **17 (3)**
- 1968 [Editor] *Life on Earth*. Hamlyn, London.
- 1969 *Nature Collecting*. Hamlyn, London.
- 1972 (with B S Martin and C G Ogden) Notes on the preparation for scanning electron microscopy. *Bull. Mus. Nat. Hist. (Zool.)* **24**, 223-228.
- 1976 Preparation techniques for biological material. *Biology Curators' Group Newsletter* **1 (3)**, 15.
- 1976 Freeze-drying of marine Zooplankton. *Monographs on Oceanographic Methodology IV: Zooplankton fixation and preservation*. UNESCO Press, Paris.
- 1978 Biodeterioration. *Biology Curators' Group Newsletter* **1 (8)**, 3-12.
- 1979 (with R O Hower) *Introduction in Freeze-drying Biological Specimens, a laboratory manual*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington.
- 1979 The conservation of one of the earliest known examples of a fluid preserved injection dissection (of a Marine Coelenterate from the John Hunter Collection). *Mus. J.* **79 (2)**, 71-72.
- 1984 *A Selective Bibliography on Preservation, Macro and Micro-anatomical Techniques: BCG Report No.3* Biology Curators' Group, Leicester.