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NSCG Newsletter

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View From The Chair

Paul A Brown, 31st May 2002

Welcome to the 19th Newsletter and the first Newsletter edited by our new Editor Vicki Noble. She is suitably qualified for the job as she has a degree in English and a Masters in Mediaeval Manuscripts and now works in the Botany Department at the Natural History Museum. Both Darren and myself are most pleased and that we have such a willing and enthusiastic volunteer for the job. Thanks go to Darren for his three-year stint as editor during which he produced 7 Newsletters and edited 266 pages of text! We also welcome Nigel Larkin to the committee and we welcome back Donna Young after a gap of 3 years. Kate Andrew was voted on as Treasurer for a further term of office in the absence of any other volunteer for that post. Simon Moore, Sue Cooke and Gabriela MacKinnon were also voted onto committee for further terms of office.

We have just had our AGM and conference at Norwich Castle Museum. At this AGM and as discussed in Newsletter No 18 we voted on two proposals dealing with the proposed merger with the BCG. At their AGM in Newcastle, the BCG membership present overwhelmingly voted for the merging of our organisations. As directed, David Carter and myself have produced a list of eight names (for BCG: David Carter, Howard Mendel, Nick Gordon and Steve Thompson and NSCG: myself, Kate Andrew, Simon Moore and Donna Young.) We will attempt to select a neutral chair and will start meeting in July 2002. The remit of the group will be as stated in proposal 2 "to write a constitution for the combined organisation and recommend the mechanism for merging" and will take into account changes in charitable status, the structure of the new group to represent Conservation and other interests, the improvement of future publications, a new name for the combined 'group', a new membership fee and other financial matters. We will report back on our progress in future Newsletters and we will work hard to have a new constitution, which is agreed to by the Charities Commission, to present to next year's AGM. Next year's AGM will probably take place in Manchester, possibly Monday 7th - Tuesday 8th April 2003. It is unfortunate that GCG cannot join us at present but we would continue to keep close contact with them via Sue Cooke and Kate Andrew. I much prefer to have them on board as I do all accredited and non-accredited Natural Science Conservators.

Please, if you have strong views on the subject, then write a letter to the membership for publication in The Newsletter, which is your vehicle to disseminate your views. Whatever the form of the new group, your views as Conservators will continue to be represented and valued both within the new group and in NCCR via Bob Entwistle and Simon Moore.

Combined Conference & AGM, 16 - 17 April 2002 Castle Museum, Norwich

AGM, 16th April 2002 :12.15 - 13.20

1. Apologies for absence
2. Consideration for the Agenda
3. Minutes of last AGM
4. Matters Arising
5. Chairs report
6. Secretary's report
7. Membership secretary's report
8. Treasurers report
9. Proposal to accept the accounts
10. Editors Report
11. Election to the Committee
12. Election of Auditors
13. NCCR Report
14. Adoption of new MA code of Ethics
15. Response to Renaissance in the Regions
16. Merger of NSCG with BCG
17. Any Other Business

Chair's Report:

Welcome to our AGM, which is my first as chairman. We are losing Darren Mann who relinquishes his post as Editor of The Newsletter. Thank you Darren for all the hard work and long hours you have put in to the job. I also wish to thank Kate Andrew for all her hard efforts as Treasurer and also for her careful interest in researching into Charity business. She finishes her three-year term of office and is willing to be voted into post again as we consider that she is very capable of fulfilling the duty. Thanks also go to Bob Entwistle and Simon Moore for their continued representation of our interests on the National Council of Conservators and Restorers. Due to pressure of work, Amanda Sutherland had to relinquish her post as Secretary to Louise Cant. Sue Lewis of the Natural History Museum stood down from committee to work at the Canadian Conservation Institute and the Conservation Section of the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa for one year.

We have continued our one-day seminar series with Simon Moore's "Sorted? No Fixed! Fluid Preservation – do we really understand it?" held at the Hampshire Museums Service centre at Winchester and sponsored by Stoezle Oberglas of Vienna; during which Simon, Julian Carter, Maggie Reilly, Andries Van Dam, Claire Valentine and Jenny Bryant certainly indicated that they knew their stuff! This was followed by a wonderful lunch and then an equally good set of afternoon store tours and conservation demonstrations. The next seminar will be held on June the 20th, will be hosted by Darren Mann at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and is entitled "Insect Collections: From Preservation to Conservation".

Wider Conservation issues during the year have included the following. Re:Source (The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries) has produced a working plan that reports a high level funding agreement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which includes the establishment of regional museums hubs as recommended in Renaissance in the Regions, the Regional Museums Task Force Report, and the strengthening of Regional Agencies and funding for the Museums sector. Resource has recognised that there is "insufficient funding, unsuitable collection storage buildings and too few skilled staff" to cope, stating that "Conservation and collections must not be neglected" and that "Conservation is just as important as access!" One hopes that this new scheme, as voiced by Steve Thompson, will not sideline the small museums and let the larger regional museum hub centres keep what funding is available for themselves. Will this include a realistic increase in funding for Natural Science Conservation and Conservation services? We sincerely hope that, via NCCR and any regional hub contacts we might make, or have already, we can effectively consult and influence Resource over Conservation issues and make sure that Conservation really is at the

forefront for Museum funding! You have a copy of our NSCG Response to "Renaissance in the Regions" in your paperwork and Kate will talk to it and accept questions before we vote to adopt it. Another document that we will vote to adopt is the Museums Association new improved Code of Ethics for Museums.

On the down side, there have been cuts in Northampton with a possible part disposal of geology and natural history collections and layoff of staff after a 'Best Value' review indicated a need for rationalisation! Nottingham City Council is planning the closure of The Natural History Museum at Wollaton Hall and its storage elsewhere with possible loss of staff as part of a £5 million redevelopment of the Hall as a Historic site. With the closure of the North-West Museums Service, Conservator posts have been reinstated within the Lancashire Museums Service.

As directed at last year's AGM, I set up a group to discuss closer ties with BCG/GCG which met at The Natural History Museum at South Kensington and which was chaired by Rob Huxley (President elect of SPNHC). This issue will be discussed and voted on under item 16 and NSCG will respond to the member's wishes.

Finally I wish to thank our hosts at Norwich Castle Museum, especially Nigel Larkin for much of the organisation, all the speakers today and Cliff Gothorpe, of Preservation Equipment Ltd, who is sponsoring our conference.

Discussions of Proposed Merger With BCG:

Paul Brown spoke in favour of the motion:

The meeting held last summer of NSCG and BCG committee members (& GCG observer) and chaired by Rob Huxley decided to run a straw pole to both NSCG and BCG memberships to gauge the support for a full merger. Both memberships replied with a yes majority, NSCG majority being exactly 66.6% of the 50% of the membership who replied. Last week at BCG's AGM, their membership overwhelmingly voted for the merging of our organisations. Any merger will probably not compromise our charitable status but will involve BCG either dissolving and joining us, or becoming a charity and then merging together with mutually agreed changes to form one Constitution. If AGM votes yes, a future joint committee will explore the best and legal way forward. It is unfortunate that GCG cannot join us at present but we would continue to keep close contact with them. I would much prefer to have them on board too so as to directly mirror SPNHC.

My personal view on the future safety and conservation of our Natural Science

Collections is that we need to develop a yet stronger voice. This we already have on NCCR hopefully, and the larger membership of a new combined conservator & curator group could give us more muscle and a higher profile in this group as well as with other organisations. We are not in competition with curators who are becoming more aware of conservation considerations, and I am sure they care about the conservation of their collections as much as we do! Jerry Weber reports that Paper Conservators merged successfully with the Archivists of the Society of Archivists without them or NCCR recognising any 'watering down' of their Conservator status. Conservators within SPNHC do not consider themselves a neglected minority within that group! My view, as stated in Newsletter 6, was that we might be swamped by the views of curators and collections managers but, I now consider that 'it is he or she who shouts loudest that is heard' and that in a new group, we would continue to represent Conservators views and rights maybe even more effectively than we do now.

Robert Entwistle spoke against the merger:

I wish to belong to the Natural Sciences Conservation Group and not be part or a sub section of a larger group. The BCG has more members and conservators would find themselves swamped in this larger group and lose their identity as a distinct unit. At present the group is well run, well supported and well funded, and the NSCG had little to gain from this merger. I am worried that little thought has gone into the details and make up of the new group, how it would function and how the interests of the conservators would be safeguarded.

When the group was first formed it contained conservators and curators, both of who were interested in natural sciences conservation, and I am worried that this merger might alienate those conservators remaining in the NSCG.

I see the merger as a step back to 10 years to before the NSCG was formed, when there was no group solely interested in natural sciences conservation, and the merger mainly as a cost saving exercise promoted by some members of both groups.

Discussion:

Sue Cooke said that many members of the group already saw the merger as a fait accompli, and so had not bothered to register their opposition. Dominique Rogers commented that the NSCG had a dedicated seat on the NCCR, and asked how conservators would be represented on the committee of the new group. Kate Andrew said that the group had a year to sort these details out. Steve Thompson also said that the vote would not be ratified till the next AGM, and there was a year for the BCG and NSCG to sort out the details.

Paul Brown suggested that we needed a majority of 66.6% of the members at the meeting to vote for the 2 resolutions in order to proceed with the merger. Discus-

sion followed as to whether the resolutions affected the constitution or not. Howard Mendel and Darren Mann said that since the proposals did not affect the constitution, we only need a majority vote to continue [as indicated in item 15.1 Powers of Amendment of the Constitution. The Constitution would be changed at next year's AGM where a 66.6% majority would be required].

It was decided by Paul Brown to vote on the 2 resolutions as published in Newsletter 18 without further comment.

Proposal 1 To merge Biology Curators Group and Natural Sciences Conservation Group to form a single organisation.

Votes cast for the resolution 20, against 5, abstentions 4. [69% voted for the motion, thus satisfying the moral (if not constitutional) requirement of 66.6% majority, ie by one vote].

Proposal 2 Subject to both organisations voting in favour of the proposal to merge, the chairmen of the respective groups are directed to set up a joint committee; to write a constitution for the combined organisation and recommend the mechanism for merging; to be presented to the Annual General Meeting in 2003 at a joint meeting (NSCG/BCG).

Votes cast for the resolution 24, against 1, abstentions 4

Election to the Committee:

Five committee member posts were up for re-election

Simon Moore	proposed by Paul Brown and seconded by Donna Young
Donna Young	proposed by Paul Brown and seconded by Simon More
Gabriela MacKinnon	proposed by Kate Andrew and seconded by Paul Brown
Sue Cooke	proposed by Simon Moore and seconded by Louise Cant.
Nigel Larkin	proposed by Kate Andrew and seconded by Maggie Reilly.

Nominations were taken from the floor for the post of editor.

Vicki Noble was proposed as editor by Darren Mann and seconded by Dominique Rogers.

The above were unanimously elected *en block*.

Pleas email if you would like full minutes of the AGM
vicn@nhm.ac.uk