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PRISM Fund supports conservation and purchase of Natural History Collections

Katherine Doyle, PRISM Fund Manager. (prism@mla.gov.uk)

It has long fallen to the natural history curator to battle against the deterioration of collections and dwindling acquisition budgets. However, there is help at hand. The Fund for the Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material (PRISM Fund) exists to support public institutions and charitable trusts looking to conserve or add to their collections.

Since 1973 the PRISM Fund has been awarding grants to help save items of importance to our scientific or industrial heritage. All fields of science and industry are eligible, including natural history, medicine, photography, engineering and geology.

The PRISM Grant Fund, managed by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), has a pot of £250,000 each year to support the acquisition and conservation of this type of material. PRISM can offer funding of up to 50% of the project costs, up to a maximum of £20,000.

Applicants do not have to be accredited institutions but they do need to have charitable purposes and exist for the public benefit. The grant-aided item must be kept in the public domain and cared for properly. When making decisions about which projects to fund, priority is given to rare and unique objects.

Recent projects supported by PRISM include:

Plymouth City Museums & Art Gallery were recently awarded £1057 to mount or create study-skins for some currently frozen donations including a Mute Swan, a Mink and Polecat. As well as increasing awareness of indigenous fauna in the Plymouth area, this project will also create the potential for more research into local biodiversity (see Fig. 1)

Torquay Museum have recently been awarded £5712 for the conservation of the palaeontology collection from Kent's Cavern. This essential work will secure the future of the collection; enabling researchers to use this valuable asset from the Pleistocene period for many years to come.

Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens have been awarded £3500 for the acquisition of the John Bell Fossil Fish Collection. This collection of Permian fossil fish from Marl Slates, Durham includes many rare specimens currently not represented in the British Museums.

Oxford University of Natural History have been awarded £20,000 for the conservation of the Fluid-Preserved Vertebrate Collection. This extensive project seeks to stabilise the collection – important as a record of the history of preparation and preservation of specimens and the history of teaching science – as well as creating a new database detailing conservation treatments and where known, the original locality of the specimens.

If you are planning a project that may benefit from PRISM do not hesitate to get in touch. For further information please contact Katherine Doyle, PRISM Fund Manager, on 020 7273 1446; email: prism@mla.gov.uk. Guidance notes, application forms, and the latest annual report are available on the MLA website at http://www.mla.gov.uk/website/aboutus/grants/PRISM_Grant_Fund



Fig. 1. Skeleton of a mute swan mounted as in flight at Plymouth Museum. One of 9 birds in the foyer of the museum, prepared by Luke Williams, osteological preparator, in Staffordshire, with the support from PRISM funding. Disarticulated mammals were also prepared as part of the funding.