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how issues such as Local Government reorganisation and the shift to a unitary authority will affect the operation of the museums in the Borders, but with some good fortune and a prevailing wind the task of curating, collecting, researching and interpreting the natural heritage of the Borders will continue for many years to come.

John Harrison
Natural Sciences Officer
Roxburgh District Museums Service

Summary of Museums Association Meeting held in Doncaster

The aim was to establish a forum where the MA, federations and specialist groups could come together, perhaps two or three times a year, at different venues around the country. Discussion indicated that twice a year would be a reasonable aim, and the next meeting may be in Bristol later this year.

The meeting was in general quite interesting, and it is useful to be able to confront the MA directly. However one little hiccup concerned the notification of the specialist groups. Although all of us had received invitations, generally via our institutions, MA claimed that they had also gone to the specialist groups as well. In fact neither the chairs or the secretaries of the BCG or GCG appear to have received any such invitation, thus potentially leaving out the whole of the Natural Sciences curatorial community. A small issue perhaps, but one I hope would not be repeated. In fact, committee members from both groups were present at the meeting.

Stephen Locke spoke on the current situation at the MA and its plans for the future. He sees the role of the MA as being to raise the standards of museums, but a principle means to do that would be by the underwriting of professional standards. He stressed that the core values of the Association would be retained, but hoped the Association would become open to a wider range of applicants than at present, shop managers being a cited example.

This led onto the review of the membership structure, and in particular the way in which the applications for associateship were to be assessed. The aim was to make the assessment more rigorous and more relevant, while again opening up the areas of museum work that could be eligible. The gaining of the diploma as a prerequisite for asso-

ciate membership was to be removed, and assessment by portfolio and interview were proposed. The award would be made on the basis of both training and experience, with the ability to demonstrate a commitment to their institution as a museum. Thus associate membership would be given on the basis not only of what they had been trained to do, but also on what they had actually done. It was accepted that criteria would be difficult to define for some areas of museum work, and also that problems might arise with respect to those people who had been awarded this status under the older regulations.

Barbara Woroncow then said a little about the (possible) forthcoming local government review. The general impression seems to be that not enough is known or decided at present, so it is difficult to know what to do (*Only in England - Ed*). Some points were made. Particular problem areas were likely to be break up of county museum services, smaller museums with a wide remit (eg. The Yorkshire Museum), and pastoral care posts not based on any institution, (eg, Gloucestershire, Cumbria and Ryedale).

The MA were to make a statement of general principles, and to set up a working party to look at any potential problems. Letters had been sent out to those museums that look as though they might be at risk, but the response has so far been poor.

Brian Hayton gave some rule of thumb points for pragmatists:

- Know what you are doing.
- Ignore what voices on high are saying. They won't know any more than you.
- Don't assume it will be alright on the night. However don't assume all change is bad.
- Keep your masters happy.
- Know who your friends are and keep them.
- Make more friends.
- Find out who writes policy and talk to them.
- Blow your own trumpet. Run information campaigns.
- Stay in charge of your own situation.

Discussion indicated that many people were still very much in the dark. The MA will put more information in the Museums Journal.

Along with a certain amount of specialist discussion, there was one topic of more general relevance. Cathy Niblett gave a talk on the provision for

disabled people in museums. This will be covered in the next round of registration, and may be a requirement rather than an option. MAGDA have a range of documents designed to help people deal with problems of disabled access, and Cathy gave some guidelines on how to meet the minimum standards.

- Conduct a disability/access audit.
- Always work in consultation with disabled people.
- Look at all types of disability. Some may be less apparent than others.
- Establish a working party which includes disabled people.
- Draw up policy and a timetabled action plan. Have this endorsed by your governing body.
- Review your progress as part of your normal review procedures.
- Be grateful for criticism, and act on it.

Promote public support.

It remains to be seen how successful these meetings will be, but they have the potential to be a useful forum, doing interactively what is otherwise covered less effectively in the Journal.
Steve Thompson, Scunthorpe Museum

REVIEWS

Duckworth, W.D., Genoways, H.H. & Rose, C.L.

Preserving Natural Science Collections: Chronicle of our Environmental Heritage

National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property, Inc. 1993. 140pp. 25 photographs. 1 figure.

This publication is the result of a joint project between NIC, the Association of Systematics Collections and the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections. The publication consists of an executive summary (4pp); Chapter 1 - Significance and value of natural science collections (11pp); Chapter 2 - the scope and nature of the conservation challenge (13pp); Chapter 3 - Meeting the challenge - recommendations and strategies (14pp); Bibliography (38pp); Glossary of selected terms (16pp); Appendix A - natural science conservation training program (7pp); Appendix B - recommended topics for research and technology transfer (7pp); Appendix C - Project chronology (2pp); Appendix D - project participants and contributors (13pp); and Appendix E - Resolutions from the International Symposium and First World Congress on the Preservation

and Conservation of Natural History Collections.

This is a useful addition to the literature. Much of the discussion and many of the recommendations will be familiar to UK natural history curators who have read *Biological Collections UK* (1987) and the *MGC Standards in the Museum Care of Biological Collections* (1982).

Recommendations include the following: 'An intensive graduate program in the conservation of natural science collections be established immediately to train a core group of conservators'; 'An ongoing graduate program in the conservation of natural science collections must be established to train conservators for the future';

'Conservators from other field be made aware of the special needs of natural science collections...';

'Institutions must develop, support and encourage education and interdisciplinary professional exchange as investments in collection care'; 'The natural science community should seek the transfer of information and technology from other conservation fields, scientific disciplines and industry'; 'Efficient methods to document specimen preparation, sampling, and other treatments or use should be developed to ensure the research integrity of the collections'; 'Databases and networks should be developed and maintained to provide the widest societal access to the information inherent in natural science collections'.

The bibliography includes many general works on conservation and draws mainly on US material although there are references to articles in the *Geological Curator*, and the *Journal of Biological Curation*. As might be expected, many of the more specific references are drawn from *Collection Forum*.

It seems likely that different solutions will be adopted in North America and in Britain. To some extent the publication has been overtaken by events in the UK and many of the recommendations have already been incorporated in the *MGC Standards*.

The forthcoming *Manual of Natural History Curatorship*, a BCG project, will provide a more in-depth analysis of many issues relating to natural science collections and particularly preparation and preservation.

Geoff Stansfield

International Symposium and First World Congress on the Preservation and Conservation of Natural History Collections – 3 Volumes. Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Archivos, Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, Spain. 1993. Vol 1 (312pp) edited by Palacios, Fernando; Martínez, Carmen & Thomas, Barbara; Vol 2 (426pp) edited by Palacios, Fernando; Martínez, Carmen & Thomas, Barbara; Vol 3 (439pp) edited by Rose, Carolyn L. Williams, Stephen L. and Gisbert, J.

The three volumes give an account of the Congress which took place in Madrid in May 1992.

Part 1 of Volume 1 includes papers presented at the opening ceremony; a summary of the symposium; report from the resolutions committee; the resolutions themselves; and remarks made at the closing ceremony. Part 2 includes 28 papers on the functions and management of natural history collections.

Part 1 of Volume 2 includes 20 papers on natural history collections in different countries and institutions and Part 2 includes 20 papers on the preservation and conservation of natural history collections.

Volume 3 includes a preface and remarks at the opening and closing sessions. Section 1 includes 6 papers and an introduction on challenges facing the preservation of natural history collections. Section 2 includes 9 papers and an introduction on collections at risk and museum responses to changing social and economic climates. Section 3 includes 7 papers and an introduction on current activities and programmes. Section 4 includes 9 papers and an introduction on future directions and strategies.

From the above it will be clear that the three volumes represent a significant publication and a challenge to the reviewer.

The preface, resolutions, opening and closing remarks and introductions are printed in full in both Spanish and English. Other papers are presented in Spanish or English with abstracts in the second language.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Congress was that it brought together so many natural history curators and so many senior museum directors. In some ways the most significant papers are those by the directors and senior staff of the national museums. These include those by Thomas E. Lovejoy, Assistant Secretary for

External Affairs at the Smithsonian Institution (The role of natural history museums in a changing world); Robert Hoffmann, Assistant Secretary for Science, Smithsonian Institution (Expanding use of collections for education and research); Alan R. Emery, Director, Canadian Museum of Nature (Changing philosophies, roles and responsibilities); Jean-Claud Hureau, Sous-Directeur, Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (Recent factors affecting the care and preservation of the Paris Museum of Natural History collections: developments and strategies); Neil Chalmers, Director, The Natural History Museum, London (Achieving strategic change: natural history collections for the 21st Century); Frank H. Talbot, Director, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution (Museums on the knife edge); Des Griffin, Director, Australian Museum, Sydney (Planning for the 21st Century and preparing for the next 500 years).

As might be expected many of the papers related to practice in museums in Spain. The UK was well represented and of particular interest to UK readers will be the papers by UK delegates which included Peter Davis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne (The preservation of fish collections: an historical perspective and Computer databases as an aid to collections research); Paul F. Clark, The Natural History Museum (Museum storage containers: back to the future); Robert May, Professor of Zoology, University of Oxford (Global change: the need and concern for collecting and preserving); Peter Crowther, Bristol Museum (Questions of acquisition: conflict and compromise in a regional museum); Phil Doughty, Ulster Museum (Collection assessments and long-range planning); Francis Howie, Safety and Conservation Advisor, The Natural History Museum (Natural science collections: extent and scope of preservation problems); and Velson Horie, Conservation Department, Manchester Museum (Conservation in Europe).

There are many other useful and interesting papers, too many to describe in this review. If it is of any help, most of these will be added to the Art and Archaeology Technical Abstracts on-line database in the near future. (See separate note in this issue).

Geoff Stansfield