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looks like an oak woodland. The study has no internal labels but a numbered system from 1 to 30 so that visitors have to use their brains at least once!

To help differentiate the sections of the gallery we colour coded the cases: dark green for Victorian, light grey for local, dark grey for projects. Our trip to Click in Milton Keynes was invaluable and I would recommend anyone to go and see the supplier first before buying.

The Victorian square was to be the static part of the gallery. Therefore, we asked NWMS to design and produce the labels, graphics and internal case layouts. Having worked before both with and without a designer, I wanted the professional input! We decided to do the remaining text, graphics and case layouts ourselves due to time and money restrictions. However, with these cases designed to change regularly, in house production was the easiest choice.

We wanted a case backing that would hide the wall and heating pipes but not detrude from the objects. Alan and I were set on hand-made paper by Maggie Holland and Carole Belfield of MAPs in Manchester. Unfortunately, a failed grant application to NW Arts left us having to use cheap wood chip paper from B&Q. Fortunately you don't notice the paper after a while. We will endeavour to raise the money for the hand-made paper.

Lighting was going to be an important part of the gallery. I was very keen on using fibre optics in the cases for both aesthetic and environmental reasons. Alan recommended Giles Barrett of Fibrelight. There are six systems in the gallery, each covering a row of cases. The lighting has been highly praised as it gives the gallery a cool look and feel. It certainly brings the specimens "to life" in a way no fluorescent light could do.

The gallery needed some major building work which our Technicians took to with a relish. Apart from the Victorian study we needed to build a new partition wall across the far third of the room. This became a stumbling block as it took much longer than we had anticipated and thus delayed completion.

We had originally planned to officially open the gallery at the end of June 1994. However, a combination of unforeseen hold ups, difficulty in booking a celebrity and me being off ill for a month put paid to that. However, the gallery did open in early July, minus the Activity Centre which wasn't finished. This was a useful exercise as it allowed the gallery to settle and gave us feedback from the public, in the light of which we made some minor changes before the official opening.

Education

The gallery was designed and thought through in conjunction with our Education department. We were all keen to incorporate aspects of National Curriculum, Science despite it changing every other day! Therefore, several of the cases in the Victorian square were geared to particular topics: genetics/evolution, geological features, food chains and taxonomy. Due to the size of the Activity Centre, school parties will have to be split. Half of the group will study the gallery choosing from a selection of suggested activities. The other half will focus on one topic of their choice, supported by the Centre's resources. The groups will then rotate.

We ran a teachers' drop-in one Saturday morning to show them the gallery and push the Activity Centre as a major resource on their doorstep. We attracted the grand total of 5 teachers, but all were very positive and went away to spread the word. As yet, we have had no formal bookings for use of the Centre.

Activity Centre

The Centre is a totally new concept for the Museum and is aimed at both schools and the general visitor. It is available for school bookings, 10.00 am - 12.00 pm, Tuesday - Friday. It will be open to the public 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm, Tuesday - Saturday, 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm on Sundays. The Centre will be manned by Museum staff and volunteers.

The Centre consists of various activities including feely boxes, touch table, microscopes and build a skeleton. The major attraction is the reserve invertebrate collections for public viewing; British lepidoptera and coleoptera, with small collections of other

invertebrate groups. They are working collections in their original cabinets, in their original state. Therefore, visitors will be able to see active rehousing into new cabinets as an example of museum work.

Plans for the future include public access to the re-housed geology collections, a TV/video unit and a computer with CD-ROM.

Feedback

The public response to the gallery has been very encouraging. There is a visitors' comments book to give us some feedback and we are planning a visitor survey, to include a study of movement flow around the displays; there is a panel showing a recommended route but few people seem to use it.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved with the project for all their help and support. It has been both frustrating and enjoyable but we now have a major new resource upon which we can build. The natural history stores can be re-developed and some of the collections on loan returned and displayed for the first time in over 50 years. Local wildlife groups are booking to visit the gallery and we have plans to develop a database for local wildlife records. Natural history is back in Chester!

BOLTON MUSEUM OPENS NEW GALLERY - WILDLIFE ON YOUR DOORSTEP

Steve Garland, Natural History Section, Bolton Museum & Art Gallery

On August 17th 1994 a new local wildlife gallery at Bolton was opened by Roy Lancaster. It marked the end of nearly five years of work. The original concept was a low-key, extremely low-cost enterprise being built slowly on a revenue budget. In 1991 the Museum successfully applied for an Inner Urban Program Grant of £50 000 spread over three years. This enabled us to speed up a little. The final cost of the whole project eventually totalled about £70,000, excluding staff time.

The Wildlife Study Centre

The theme is of local wildlife, but the idea was also to promote the use of the gallery and our collections in new ways. As we began planning, the 'flavour of the month' was Liverpool Museum's Natural History Centre. Unfortunately, in common with most museums, we could only dream of that sort of exhibit with a non-national budget to finance the project. What evolved was a whole new approach where the public and school groups get access to hundreds of specimens, a touch-screen computer and a close-up video camera without supervision. It does get regular visits from staff to keep materials topped up and to check on the equipment.

The Wildlife Study Centre has been fitted out using school bench-tops, cupboards and stools. Plastic (polythene) drawers were sourced from Yorkshire Purchasing's catalogue and a local plastics firm cut snug-fitting perspex lids. The drawers are all Plastozote lined to provide shock-resistance for the exhibits. Items have been accumulated over the last three years for this area and are generally of a robust nature and of low scientific and monetary value. A variety of techniques has been used to attach them to the Plastozote, depending on the types of object. The lids were originally riveted in place, but experience has now led us to use a hot-glue gun. It is relatively easy to remove the lids when repairs are needed although this is not something one wishes to do too often.

In addition there are a number of larger items on open display ranging from horns and antlers to pine cones and shells. A few are securely fastened, but many are not. The close-up video-camera is a simple home video unit with a close-up lens attached. The whole camera is enclosed in a specially built perspex cover and is positioned so that the auto-focus facility can cope with any of the objects in trays placed beneath it. The auto-focus was thoroughly tested to check that it still worked through two layers of perspex! The magnification levels are not as great as with other commercially available set-ups, but the costs are only a fraction.

The camera is connected to two televisions, one positioned to allow the user to see the picture from next to the camera; the other pointing away to be used with groups to show small objects to groups. Tiny objects such as insects can now be demonstrated to school groups, opening up a whole new area of the collections for potential educational use!

The Centre also has a touch-screen computer with information about our local wildlife. It has photographs of local sites, fauna and flora. You can even hear the sound of a fox or the wonderful call of the red grouse! This was produced by a company called Novus. We kept costs down by sourcing most of the photographs from staff and local naturalists. Not only is the computer popular, but the sounds of owls hooting and badgers grunting is guaranteed to attract visitors to the gallery.

Finally there is a continuous supply of scrap paper, worksheets and crayons for drawing and writing. This is the most popular pastime with children. A drawer of exhibits can provide hours of fun! Who needs computers???

Local Information Centre

The Wildlife Study Centre provides one temporary display case and a large notice-board, also the Main Gallery contains an information board. These areas are used to publicise various aspects of the museum's work, work of local voluntary groups and general environmental topics. Here you can find details of every forthcoming natural history meeting in the area, contacts for all relevant local societies and leaflets on all aspects of the environment from pollution to country parks to tree preservation orders! This is also the place that we publicise wildlife surveys for our Biological Records Centre.

The Main Gallery Displays.

The main gallery display is a mixture of detailed dioramas and smaller topical displays relating to environmental issues. We have attempted to maintain the highest quality of presentation throughout (finances permitting). There has been an enormous input from natural history staff and the museum's display technician.

The main displays are built over the carcasses of old brass cases. These were very shallow and awkward to access, due to heavy doors. They also had internal fluorescent lighting that required removal of exhibits when lamps required servicing. The new cases are all fibre-optic lit with eight 150 Watt units providing light for all the cases. The power units are sited on top of the cases, so servicing is easy. Light levels are maintained at between 50 to 100 lux in most areas and the fibre-optic light is cold with minimal Ultra Violet content.

The new cases were built by our display technician, Gary Webster, and provide much more display space, changing the area from one with cases lining the walls to a display area with bays. Taxidermy Technician Geoff Yates built all of the major dioramas and several smaller displays. Keepers Patricia Francis and Kathryn Berry built most of the others and researched and wrote most of the labels. Reading ages were carefully checked, and topics carefully linked with the ever-present, ever-changing National Curriculum where possible.

Labelling dioramas has always been a problem. Do we place numbers or names by everything and kill the whole effect? Maybe we should use outline drawings to match up the specimens. We decided against this because we felt that people did not identify the specimens, merely recognise the willow warbler because it is the one on the left with its wings open, as in the outline. We were fortunate to be able to work with Blackpool and The Fylde College who have a Scientific Illustration Course. Students performed work as part of their course, some on placement in the museum. The styles of the labels vary, but many are of exceptional quality. The originals are carefully stored; the displays using colour photocopies. Interestingly, the quality of colour photocopies is nowadays very good and they appear to be extremely resistant to fading. They can be produced directly from colour transparencies as well as from artwork. Our A2 copies cost around £18 each. We hope that people

now look at the colours and markings of the plants and animals to identify the exhibits; good luck to them with the warblers!

We attempted to use the best quality exhibits wherever possible. Many new displays in some quite famous large museums have been let down by (frankly) tatty animal specimens. The insect displays (wall mounted under large perspex covers) contain exhibits in mostly lifelike poses. Why is it that invertebrate displays are so often of set specimens straight out of the collection drawer. Would you use a study skin of a vole in a diorama? Plants are always a problem. The gallery uses a variety of techniques from detailed wax models to photographs, air-dried and freeze-dried specimens.

Educational Use By Schools

As part of the project we developed an Education Pack. This was designed, researched and put together by Econsult, the trading arm of our local Lancashire Wildlife Trust, with copious input from Kathryn and Patricia. Chris Whitehead at the LWT was largely responsible for the content (as he was for the design of the original food-web game adapted as a floor-mounted version in the gallery). It is an impressive educational package that, due to sponsorship from Marks & Spencer and the Friends of Bolton Museum & Art Gallery we have been able to distribute free to all Bolton Schools. (If you would like a pack please send a cheque for £12.50 p+p incl. payable to 'Bolton Metro') The pack has fifty high quality worksheets printed onto card. Teachers can photocopy them for use on visits or in school before or after a visit. There is also a twenty page teachers' guide included with background information and booking details. The recent appointment of a part-time Natural History Education post has been especially welcome to exploit this fully.

A small selection of sheets are provided free in dispensers for the public to use. This is a popular feature of our service in Bolton. Last year the Museum distributed over 300,000 sheets on all subjects to the public and to visiting school groups. Copies are produced on a very large council copier and the cost is around £3500 per year! (We received over 150,000 visitors last year.)

The gallery has been designed with children in mind. Around the front of all the cases is a small step. This is narrow enough to be no problem to adults, but are high enough for children to see into the higher cases, thus eliminating the eternal problem. (The majority of museum displays are too high for kids). These same steps provide resting surfaces for worksheets on clipboards. They also provide impromptu seats for exhausted parents who have given-up trying to get their offspring to leave the Museum!!

The Wildlife Study Centre has been designed to hold half a school class. A number of additional exhibits and some other equipment are available from locked cupboards for use by teaching staff.

Does It All Work ?

In a word, YES! Natural History Staff who visit the gallery to top up leaflets, worksheets, crayons and paper have been accosted on a number of occasions!! Members of the public can't resist thanking us! At autumn half-term the Wildlife Study Centre was so full that people were standing around waiting to get in!! A small donations box (a purely voluntary and very low-key afterthought) raises about £7 a week on average. Feedback from schools has only just begun, but seems good.

Oh!! I forgot to mention the ten foot house sparrow!!

B. P. BEIRNE MICROSCOPE SLIDES OF ICHNEUMONIDAE AT THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON

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Introduction

In connection with a project to study the phylogenetic relationships of the subfamilies and certain selected genera of