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## BOLTON MUSEUM – A RECENT HISTORY OF THE NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

Steve Garland, Bolton Museum

Bolton Museum & Art Gallery has recently undergone many changes. These notes provide a background to the Museum today.

In August 1994 we opened a new gallery, Wildlife on your Doorstep. This contains dioramas and other displays of Bolton's fauna and flora. In addition, we built a Wildlife Study Centre with interactive and hands-on exhibits. The project was complemented by a comprehensive Education Pack for use by school visitors, both in the galleries and back at school.

This gallery was successful as a Royal Mail NW Museum of the Year Award winner in 1995. The £2,000 prize is being used to install an induction loop system to benefit hearing-impaired visitors, especially school groups.

Staff time was devoted to this project over more than five years, but most intensively from 1991 to 1994, when the project was boosted by £50,000 of Urban Program Grant Aid.

Concurrently, the Section has pursued an active policy to improve collection storage. In the Biology Collection UK Report the majority of our collections were deemed to be overcrowded, poorly stored and inaccessible. Part of a less-used display area has been converted for storage and this has enabled us to improve overall standards considerably. The need for this change was originally generated by the acceptance of about half of the mounted bird collection from Salford Museums (the rest being accepted by Manchester Museum).

Just as life was starting to return to normal around October 1994 our local fire officer made the startling suggestion that we needed a new fire escape for the public (if we expected to remain open!). This necessitated complete demolition of all staff offices, temporary accommodation behind wooden screens in the public gallery and total relocation of the geology collection to a basement store next door.

*[Note: since the Bolton meeting the whole geology collection has been moved again to permanent storage in an external store. Three weeks of solid hard labour; but resulting in a new store with remote environmental monitoring, full humidity control and the space for moderate expansion!].*

We now have all entomology together, all geology together, all botany together and most vertebrate zoology together. All collections are accessible and we even have a few work areas in our stores!

In addition, we have taken an opportunity to reorganise our offices and library. Our new computer system is peer-to-peer networked, enabling several users to access the Records Centre database. It is now also possible to find work areas for about four visitors at once!

The improvements (or living hell) that the Section has been through in the last year should be set against the improvements that you see today.

## LEGAL ASPECTS OF TENDERING FOR CONTRACTS

Trevor Grundy, Bolton MBC Solicitors Office.

*[Notes compiled by Charles Pettitt]*

### What is a Contract?

A contract consists of an **offer**, an **acceptance**, a **consideration**, and finally an **intention** to create legal relations between the parties to the contract.

### What is Tendering?

Tendering is the **offer** referred to above, and involves making a **sealed bid**. Such a bid commits your governing body (and you!), and will form the basis for any contract. Therefore it is important that you 'clear' the details of a tender with your governing body before submitting it.

### For what can you Tender?

A tender has to be for specific, well-defined work; that is, one cannot tender for 'open-ended' work.

If the bid is being submitted within the public sector, then it is important to realise that a public body can only do what it is specifically empowered to do by legislation. Check with your legal department if you have any doubts.

If the bid is being submitted by a museum curator who intends to do the work as a **freelance** then first check your contract of employment to ensure that you are permitted to work for other people. Remember that the Museum Association Code of Conduct enjoins you to ensure there is no conflict of interest in the proposed work.

If you are working as a freelance then you cannot 'borrow' *anything* from your governing body to do the work. This means that even looking at specimens down a museum microscope is not allowed. Thus a sum, previously agreed with your employers, should be included in the bid to cover the cost of any facilities and materials you may require to do the work.

### What about the Money?

This is firstly the **consideration** mentioned above; some money or 'money's worth' must change hands for a contract to exist.

Charges: Remember that any charges for people's time must include the 'on-costs', that is the additional money it cost your employer over and above your salary. These costs should be determined from the salaries section of your employing authority. If you are working as a freelance, remember to make allowance for *all* your cost – tax, national and professional insurance, professional memberships, and any other expenses not specifically detailed in the bid.

Fees are laid down for Local Authorities, and you would need to establish the current range of charges from your employing authority. This probably also is the case in trustee and university run museums.

**What happens when it goes wrong** [Note: 'when' is what the man said; I should hope 'if' is more realistic!].

Breaches of Contract: This occurs if you fail to deliver the 'money's worth'; ie. if you fail to complete the work for which you tendered, or do not complete it to a satisfactory standard. Be sure you can cope with the job, don't overstretch yourself. Above all be clear what your obligations are under the contract, and make sure the people with whom you are contracting are equally clear and in agreement – if possible get any 'grey areas' agreed in writing.

**Negligence:** if working on a contract for your employing authority, negligence cover is for them to provide. If, however, you choose to go freelance, then make sure you have adequate professional indemnity insurance.

## Conclusions

1. Be clear about any restrictions on the work you may or may not do.
2. Know what you are letting yourself in for, and don't bite off more than you can chew.
3. Ensure you have adequate resources available to do the work.
4. If in doubt, CHECK!
5. If still in doubt, DON'T DO IT!

## SURFING THE BUDGET CUTS: THE RANGE OF CONSULTANCY WORK AT SHEFFIELD MUSEUM

Derek Whiteley, Sheffield Museum.

### Introduction

Some years ago, during my stint as BCG Secretary, the Committee initiated **BCG Watchdog**, a pro-active lobby to put pressure on museums to fill vacant posts, thaw out 'frozen' posts and even create new ones. We lobbied directors, committee chairs, local groups, embarrassed museums now and then, and threatened excommunication from the Beetle-down Campaign. We had a fair degree of success.

Nowadays the task is more difficult. Entire natural history services are being wiped out. Lincoln and the Passmore Edwards spring to mind. In 1993 Sheffield came perilously close to disappearing.

### Sheffield

The political goings-on between a strongly Socialist local authority and a strongly Conservative Central Government are well documented in the media. Ratecapping, pollcapping, community charge capping, redetermination bids and decreasing central support grants have become a way of life year in year out.

In 1991 the running costs of the World Student Games and subsequent capital repayments have put additional financial pressure on Sheffield City Council, particularly the Leisure Services Directorate which now includes the Arts and Museums Department.

Our sufferings over the past ten years can be summarised as follows:-

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1985-1990 | 'Salami-slicing' off activity budgets                     |
| 1991      | Large deficit to make good                                |
| 1992      | Cuts. Income targets introduced                           |
| 1993      | Big cuts  |
| 1994      | Cuts - Natural History budget goes into 'negative equity' |
| 1995      | More cuts.  |

As a 'cost centre manager' one is faced with a choice of options:-

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Museum entrance charges                 | - politically unacceptable                           |
| Macerate all activity budgets           | - all activity ceases                                |
| Whinge and moan and protest             | - only goes so far                                   |
| Lose staff as 'surplus to requirements' | - leads to staff insecurity, stress and demotivation |
| Make some money                         | - the only real alternative.                         |

At this point I need to emphasise that income-generation does not necessarily mean total commercialisation. We still believe in a free museum, free bench space, free access to collections and a free service to the general public, science, scholars etc. We are simply acting as a modern Robin Hood,

taking money from commercial organisations to maintain a free and better service to the 'poor'.

Diversity is the key to survival. At Sheffield we have tried the following methods for generating income:-

1. **A Zoological Consultancy Service:** Field surveys, identification and analysis. Mainly invertebrates but also bats, amphibians and badgers. We do not tender, but offer a service at a fixed price to customers who wish to pay - a 'quality' service - there, I've said it!

[Our own Ecology Unit, formed in 1986, later grew into the City Ecology Unit with its own budget. In 1991 it developed a consultancy wing offering a comprehensive ecological service. More recently it has formed a partnership with Sheffield Hallam University - the Sheffield Centre for Ecology and Environmental Management (SCEEM). Staff levels have increased from 2 to about 19. The City Ecology Unit still exists within the Museum as a core City Council function but it is mutually supportive of SCEEM]

There is an internal market whereby we (the curatorial Natural History Section) provide a specialist service to SCEEM, usually as part of larger projects. It sounds complex, but it seems to work well.

Our other customers have included ADAS, British Coal, R.J.Budge, Peak Park Joint Planning Board, other local authorities and private ecological consultancies.

In 1994 and 1995 we collaborated with Sheffield University to research the Auvergne area of France. Unfortunately these field trips were little more than a week long but were entirely funded by external monies. Still, it is important, I think, that provincial museums do not become too parochial, although it is difficult for us to justify such pleasant work abroad for more than a short period each year. Local issues have priority.

2. **Geology:** In 1995 Gaynor Boon secured substantial funding to conserve the unique Middlewood Fossil Forest in Sheffield. Gaynor and Paul Richards did much of the fieldwork and project management in collaboration with South Yorkshire RIGS Group. Staff time was costed into the project.

3. **Meteorological Data:** Sheffield City Museum has operated the city's official weather station since 1882. Data, collected on a daily basis are validated by the Met. Office. A public service is delivered to about 10,000 customers each year. Much of the service is free, but charges are made to commercial organisations such as insurance companies and loss adjusters, insurance claimants requiring 'real time' wind data (a special new service) and City Council Departments. A subscription charge to a monthly weather information sheet also generates income.

4. **Invertebrate Identification Day Schools:** Part of our Sheffield Biodiversity Research Project aims to provide training in the identification of less popular taxa. Our series of Saturday Dayschools has included sessions on Carabidae, Millipedes, Hoverflies, Spiders, Soldierflies and on geological topics. We charge £9 per day and re-invest the income in microscopes and bench facilities. Accommodation for 12 'students' is now available in the Invertebrate Study Room, where reference collections are available as part of the dayschool. These dayschools have proved to be very popular, attracting people from an 80 mile radius, generating income, increasing collection use and raising the standards of taxonomic expertise. An enlarged programme is planned for 1996.

5. **Grant Aid:** It is possible to be much more positive and