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Having experienced self-employment, my suggestion for a workable future for all branches of Natural Science Conservation is as follows:

1. Training course to equip natural science graduates with a post graduate qualification encompassing museum practice and collecting theory with special reference to older collections, materials science, preventative conservation and hands-on natural science practical conservation skills. Also available as a part-time course for interested parties in employment.

2. Internship programme to enable natural science graduates, but preferably conservation graduates, museum studies and course 1 postgraduates, to gain practical experience in natural science conservation in an environment with real work and funding pressures. If no prior conservation training, units of course 1 &/or Leicester Museum Studies course should be attended, however there is probably already enough demand to have a prior training requirement.

3. NVQ levels 4 & 5 in Natural Science conservation to demonstrate practical ability.

4. New posts for natural science conservators, initially one per area museum service on an employed but partially income generating basis with **realistic** targets.

5. On-going in service training, for conservation management and higher levels of NVQs.

6. Progression to higher levels of museum management, enabling a flow of natural science conservation skills rather than stagnation or loss.

REGIONAL COLLECTION STORES, ARE THEY A VIABLE PROPOSITION?

Ian Wallace, Liverpool Museum.

Data Collection

A federation of biology curators in the North West of England, known as the North West Collections Research Unit (NWCURU) has recently surveyed all 60 institutions that we know hold natural history collections in the region. The survey looked at collection content and condition. It was grant aided from the Museums & Galleries Commission Natural Sciences Incentive Fund administered through the North West Museums Service. The report will be available to all participating institutions shortly. The section produced by Gary Cleland and Ian Wallace contains the data on which the paper on Regional Collection Stores was based.

Is there a need for Regional Stores?

The function of a Regional Collection Store would be to house specimens from several museums in a retrievable way and secure from additional deterioration.

A curator regularly using, or wanting to make sure that they could use material at a moments notice, is not going to want that material in a store more than 40 yards away, let alone 40 miles. Material that is not being, nor likely to be ever looked at would, however, seem a suitable candidate for a regional store. Is there a lot of such material? – the NWCURU survey attempted to assess this.

Scale of use of collections classified by type of institution

Institutions holding Natural History material were classified into three types:-

Type 1. Institutions with Natural History curator with formal museum training. Here all 10 claimed, not

surprisingly to use the collections.

Type 2. Institutions with a non-Natural Historian curator with formal museum training. In these only 2 of the 21 claimed their material was used!

Type 3. Institutions with curator having no formal museum training e.g. College lecturer, research station scientist, society curator (and collections in total store – locked away). Here over a third, 11 of the 29, claimed their material was used.

Note that in claiming that collections are used, almost no curator would claim that their material was exploited to its maximum but most natural history material being looked after by natural history curators receives at least some use.

The nature of the under-utilised material

It is worth looking at the un-used or seriously under-utilised material in the North West in more detail. Using the numbers given above and multiplying them by the collection content data collected during the survey enables the following table to be produced:-

Table 1. CATEGORY	UNUSED MATERIAL		USED MATERIAL	
	(type 2)	(type 3)	(type 1))	(total)
Mounts	2,229	743	20,271	(23,841)
Vert. skins	521	100	75,749	(76,972)
Osteology	85	288	12,333	(13,086)
Eggs	15,838	2,000	105,016	(127,936)
Insects	35,390	9,390	3,978,810	(4,080,032)
Molluscs	50,586	11,165	773,400	(844,466)
Other dry inverts	772	92	91,087	(92,296)
Spirit inverts	90	3,000	112,086	(116,346)
Micro. slides	675	7,820	45,447	(61,522)
Herb. Sheets	9,686	9,075	2,272,340	(2,351,737)
Other Bot.	450	720	308,655	(310,001)
Biol. models	1	6	1,230	(1,337)
Rocks	6,083	1,269	23,199	(56,853)
Minerals	9,283	3,177	48,168	(71,746)
Fossils	13,913	6,582	390,829	(434,849)
Other Geo.	0	462	11,932	(12,534)
TOTAL	180,000	57,000	8.75 million	(9 million)

TOTAL Type 2 + Type 3 = 237,000 which as % of Type 1 or Cat.Total = 2.7%

The immediate conclusion from examining Table 1 is that only a small proportion of the regions natural history material is languishing with little chance of ever being used. There is probably not enough 'languishing material' on its own to justify establishing a Regional Store. The store only becomes a viable proposition if it also includes material from those museums classed as having "well used" collections – those with natural history curators. Of that material the greatest problem is produced by mounted mammals and birds. Paradoxical material in that it includes the most used specimens – those on public display – but also what are often one of the least used parts of a collection when they are off display and crammed into stores.

Many museums would love to release the storage space occupied by this mounted material for other uses if they knew they could retain access to that material. If we therefore consider a sizeable proportion of the north west's mounted material as being potential candidates for a regional store, that might make it more feasible. We have estimated we would need a minimum of 50,000 sq. feet to store and service the region's mounted material.

It would be too easy for a Regional Store to become a very convenient dump for material never likely to be used that could not be thrown away easily because of legal problems,

but this could be discouraged by store managements charging suitable fees. Deciding upon the fees to be charged would require careful consideration. The utility of the material put into store and the terms on which it could be subsequently used is clearly relevant. A store (for mounted material) could undertake and charge for conservation work. It could act as a broker for lending specimens between museums, in which case the fees for storing a desired specimen would surely be reduced. It would certainly be essential to have a steady movement of specimens in and out for that indicated that the material was desirable and thus worth storing. Stores for material never likely to be used would be impossible to fund from any source.

Even if filled with regularly requested loan material there would still be a problem with something called a store – sounds very dry and undesirable. I am confident one will never be built. It might be if it is called a Collection Resource Centre. It stands an even better chance if it throws open its resources to visitors. Undoubtedly some of the material will have appeal and rows of fine large mammal mounts would be a great attraction. Cabinet after cabinet of the same range of British Butterflies or Indo-Pacific Mollusca, or of indifferently mounted otters, to name but a few, probably would not. The indifferently mounted otter, if it was being conserved or re-modelled might have significant appeal however, as would the indo-pacific mollusca as handling items. Of course the visitors will need good toilets, and cafe, and there will have to be people to guard the items or to explain their significance.

Suddenly the Regional Store becomes a fully fledged museum. In fact it probably makes the most sense to attach a Regional Store to an existing museum service because they have an infra-structure to cater for the visitor, publicise and exploit the facility.

Regional Stores for natural history material may not have been built yet but movement of un-used collections from small museums to larger museums is taking place. In some respects biology curators have caused problems for themselves by claiming that all natural history material is valuable, for a donating museum could claim therefore that they were not passing on problems but assets and should perhaps even receive payment for lending, not the other way round!

Places like Manchester, Liverpool and Bolton have all received material this way recently but let us not forget the Lancashire Service at Fleetwood, which probably has in its terms of reference the greatest claim to do the job for Lancashire, but seems almost as under-resourced as the museums from whom its material comes. The largest institutions can be said to receive some of their funding because of their wide remit and there have been limited funds for new cabinets and documentation from the Natural Sciences Incentive Fund for some recipients, but the long-term cost implications have not been funded. These are not only those for servicing the space occupied but that it brings forward the time when new stores need to be built.

Another question is how much of an asset is the material? A difficult question, as the answer "not much" would invite the further question "Is the material of any value then?" The Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside require that acquisitions significantly increase the utility of the collections as a whole. It is true that increasing the size of a series of a species available for examination increases the value of the whole collection but

the temptation to take the best and ignore the rest is strong.

I have suggested that attaching a Regional Store to an existing museum may be the most sensible solution. Which museum?. It should be an asset many would want. One solution is to have several stores and to specialise so that X becomes the regional store for mounted material, Y for Mollusca, Z for insects and so on. This would be a move towards the rationalisation of collections that everyone is starting to talk about at last. Small museum collections do not in general have specialist natural history curators so rationalisation would not produce the staff savings to pass to the store, and analysis of most natural history curatorial jobs would reveal that they are to support a service of which the collections are a tool. If money will not come from staff savings, how about from storage space?. Collection stores are in buildings and the maintenance of the buildings is the major cost. Alas, maintaining an empty store-room is almost as costly as maintaining a full one.

The main cost currently associated with this material is opportunity cost. I can think of several museums where a lot of space is filled with un-used natural history material; several of these are caring for it well in that the environment is well monitored but several are desperate for space and the natural history material jostles for space alongside that other type of junk – social history items or in one case racks of fine art. That space could be much better used but in a poor economic environment there are no resources, no pressures, to better utilise the space. That means that there are obviously no funds available to vire to regional stores. However funds may become available. For example Lottery Bids to develop the Museum of X in existing buildings would require that space was generated by getting rid of inappropriate items. BCG must monitor these carefully and look for museums suddenly keen to off-load natural history material – they must be made to pay to empty their space for new developments.

Might the Lottery be a source of money for a Regional Natural History Store. I can see the Lottery Bid now. £5 million to move un-used natural history collections from inaccessible locations to anonymity and occasional consultation in a vast central store. If sheer cheek won bids then it should succeed. It is only by being part of a very innovative information and visitor facility that it would have any chance.

What building they might be in is another uncertainty. An extension to the existing city centre museum building seems the most expensive; a new warehouse in an industrial estate probably the best; a new use for that grade 2 listed warehouse that cannot be demolished the most likely!

A world with a smaller number of museums holding natural history collections has some advantages. With their specialisations the service provided by all of them together is better. But there is a role for the small generalists. This paper so far may seem to have made an assumption that the only future for natural history material in many small museums without specialist curators is to move it to a regional store or another museum. However, I believe this to be defeatist. One obvious option is to develop a use for the material. Totally impractical in today's economic environment of course, or is it? What about Oldham Museum whose natural history section rose like a Phoenix from its store to become, admittedly mainly via its Parrot display, a dynamic force in the region. Or the Grosvenor Museum, Chester where after

being threatened with total dissolution to other museums, the collections now support a Curator.

Finally, this paper might give the impression that Regional Stores are a novel idea. The Fine Artists in the North West have reached the stage of a discussion paper currently being circulated. Regional Stores for archaeological excavated material are already in existence and some are full or nearly full and having to decide on rationalisation – what a surprise!

MONEY FOR OLD COLLECTIONS! THE SHEFFIELD MUSEUM'S SHOWS

Paul Richards, Sheffield Museum.

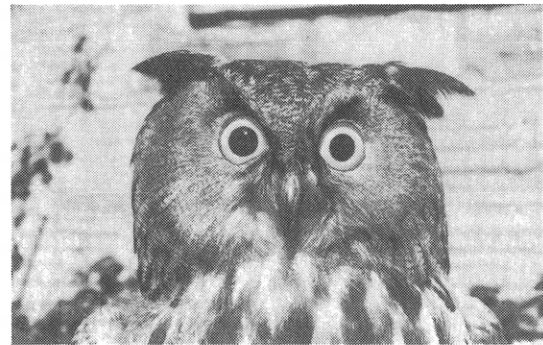
In recent years Sheffield Museum Service has faced a variety of cumulative budget reductions, spending freezes, increased income targets and staff cuts. In response to these, the Natural History Section has chosen to take the path of income generation rather than accept further cuts to the service and manpower. The role of environmental consultancy contracts has been discussed elsewhere (D. Whiteley, this issue). The other major source of income for the section has been the presentation of temporary exhibitions during school half-term holidays, for which a small charge is levied. These are known locally as "nine day wonders!" They are based on the principle of bringing a discrete section of the collections out of storage so that the public are able to see what they perceive as our 'hidden treasures'. Specimens are augmented with information panels, practical activities and children's events.

The initial impetus came from the BCG ~Beetle-Down" week in July 1988. An attempt was made to imitate on a small scale the Liverpool Natural History Centre. Specimens were brought out from behind the scenes for visitors to view and handle. Microscopes, computers and quizzes were used to enhance the experience and all members of Natural Science staff were available to answer enquiries, demonstrate equipment and protect specimens. Admission was free and the whole event was an enormous success.

As a result of the following BCG campaign, "Biology Collections in Crisis: The Sunflower Campaign" money was made available through the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council for work on entomology collections. The RECAP grants enabled Sheffield Museum to employ two lepidopterists to amalgamate, rehouse and catalogue the entire British Lepidoptera collection of over 20,000 specimens. Upon completion a leaflet was produced outlining the history and strengths of the collection, to be used as an entrance ticket for the "Big Butterfly Show". The main aim of the show was to generate income for the section and provide the matching money for the RECAP grant!

The Big Butterfly Show was held over the February half-term period and cost £1 for adults and 50p for children and concessions (under 4's free). The entire Lepidoptera collection was brought into the museum lecture room and visitors were free to look through it as they wished. Supervision was provided by museum staff and the original RECAP employees. To save the voices and sanity of the demonstrators, information panels were produced to answer the most basic questions. Microscopes were available showing 'the microscopic beauty of butterfly wings'. The biological records centre RECORDER data-base was accessible to look up local Butterfly information. The Human History section put together a small display of related artifacts and the Education Services section ran a variety of craft activities for children. Along with quizzes, gallery

DON'T MISS YOUR ONE AND ONLY CHANCE TO SEE HUNDREDS OF BIRDS FROM THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION THIS HALF TERM AT THE



BIG BIRD SHOW



- * Children's Activities Included.
- * Birds to study, Birds to handle.
- * Computer Identification * Birds Eggs.
- * The beauty of birds under the microscope.
- * Wheelchair access * Deaf-awareness Staff Available.
- * Hundreds of British, Tropical and European birds from the Museum's collection specially dusted down and brought out for you to enjoy.

City Museum 12th - 20th February 1994
Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Weston Park Sunday 11 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. (Monday-closed)

ADMISSION CHARGE £1.20 Adults 60p all concessions

trails, leaflets, other insect specimens and setting demonstrations there was a great deal to do in a very small space. A popular feature was the addition of live tropical butterflies in a large flight case. These obligingly emerged from pupae from time to time while live caterpillars munched their way through their food via a video camera and TV link. Although popular (and possibly essential), the use of livestock presented numerous challenges. Not the least of which were getting pupae to emerge before or during the show and finding food sources for the adults and subsequent larvae during February. Devious use of fridges, incubators and Gro-lights saved the day, and most of the butterflies!

Over 5,000 people visited the show in 9 days. After expenditure on demonstrator wages, livestock and teaching equipment the show made a "surplus" of around £2,000. In addition spin off lectures on Butterflies were charged at £30 a time.

Because of continuing financial constraints, a second event was planned for October half-term period to help pay for improvements to the fossil store. The appropriately titled "Rock and Fossil Show" enabled the museum to display recent curatorial work on the fossil and mineral collections. The entrance ticket/leaflet had now evolved into an inky dinosaur hand stamp! Again the show was a great success with over £1,800 being made available to match with other grant monies.

The experience gained in presenting these events would prove invaluable during 1993 when even tighter financial