



COPROLITE

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DROPPINGS FROM THE GEOLOGICAL CURATORS GROUP

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Please note that the 29th AGM of the Geological Curators' Group will be held at 16.00 on 10 December 2002 at the Sedgwick Museum, Downing Street, Cambridge. Nominations for the posts of Officers and 2 Committee Members must be made by two members of the Group and submitted in writing to Giles Miller, GCG Secretary, Department of Palaeontology, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD by **Tuesday 19 November 2002**.

Subscriptions 2003

Subscriptions are due on 1 January 2003. As agreed at the last AGM, subscriptions will be increased this year. The subscription for UK Personal Members is now £12 and for Overseas Personal Members it is £15. Institutional subscriptions will also rise, to £16 for UK institutions and to £18 for Overseas institutional subscribers.

Standing Orders. UK Personal Members can now pay by Standing Order, and members are strongly encouraged to do so to help keep down costs. Please follow the instructions on the Standing Order form on pages 22 and 23, complete the form and return it to Giles Miller, GCG Secretary.

Gift Aid. As a charity, GCG can recover tax from the Inland Revenue at a rate of 28p for each £1 of your subscription if you are a UK taxpayer. It costs you nothing and GCG benefits, helping to keep costs and subscriptions down. Please sign the Gift Aid declaration on the subscription renewal form on page 21.

Eurozone members please note: we can now accept payment in Euros (2003 subscription is €23). Please make Eurocheques payable to the Geological Curators' Group and send your subscription to Gilès at the address below.

North American members please note: we can now accept payment in US dollars (2003 subscription is US\$23). Please make checks payable to the Geological Curators' Group and send them to Tiffany Adrain, Department of Geoscience, The University of Iowa, 121 Trowbridge Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242.

Subscriptions unpaid by 30 April 2003 will be deemed to have lapsed.

Please return the subscription form, with your payment, or the Standing Order form, to Dr Giles Miller, Department of Palaeontology, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD.

New Members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Andrew Henderson**, Natural History Museum, London; **Valerie Martin-Rowland**, Université Paul Sabatier, Toulouse; **Mark Dean**, British Geological Survey, Edinburgh; **Rebecca Pyne**, Doncaster; **Norman H. Harrison**, Grosvenor Museum, Chester; and **Kevin Walsh**, Oxford University Museum of Natural History.

John Norton MBE

GCG members will be sorry to hear of the death of John Norton, formerly Curator of Ludlow Museum. John passed away in the early hours of Monday 17 June. His health had been failing in recent years and he had had several spells in hospital, but his death has still come as a shock to his family and friends who expected him to pull through like so many times before. John, a GCG member since 1975, was elected one of our earliest Honorary Members in recognition of his many years of exceptional curatorial work at Ludlow. He will be remembered as a true gentleman and a fine curator. A full obituary will appear in due course in *The Geological Curator*.

Bill Sarjeant

We are also sorry to report that another GCG member of long standing, Professor William Anthony Swithin Sarjeant, Professor of Geology at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, died on 8 July. He was 67. Bill Sarjeant's interests were broad, from dinoflagellates to dinosaurs, but many members will know him for his massive 10 volume bibliography, *Geologists and the history of geology*.

Musical curators

Mike Simms has been appointed Curator of Palaeontology at the Ulster Museum and took up his post in May. **Louise Anderson**, a geology graduate of Leeds University, has been appointed Geology Access Assistant on the Dinosaur Coast Project in Yorkshire. She took up her post, which is based at Scarborough Museum in October. **Chris Collins**, formerly of the American Museum of Natural History, took up the post of Head of the Palaeontology Conservation Unit at the Natural History Museum in London in September; **Alan Hart**, acting Collections Leader in the Mineralogy Department at the Natural History Museum, has been appointed to that post.

UK ratifies UNESCO 1970

It was announced in August that the UK has now formally signed up to the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The prospect of this event stimulated considerable debate and alarm at the GCG meeting on ethics held in Manchester last year, and GCG's working party is meeting shortly to clarify our position.

Exhibitions 2002-2003

Dinobirds. The feathered dinosaurs of China Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London until 5 May 2003.

Treasures of the Earth: the hidden world of minerals, rocks and natural crystals Saffron Walden Museum, Essex 16 November 2002 - 30 March 2003.

Double jeopardy: news on some geological collections at risk

A considerable amount of time, effort and worry is expended by your committee on the vexed issue of collections at risk. Whether they are under the care of local authorities, university or other museums, every year a number of cases arise that warrant our urgent attention. This year has been no exception, and I have had dealings (in some cases ongoing) concerning the collections held in five institutions. Not all the news is bad, and in a number of cases the risk to the geological collection seems to have abated.

In December last, my predecessor as Chairman received a communication stating that Gloucester City Council was considering closing the Gloucester City Museum, which obviously would impinge on the welfare of the collections. The museum contains material from S S Buckman, Harriet Mary Hutton and others. After some communication, in which the value and importance of the collections was pointed out to the authorities, the City Council decided against closure. They are investigating the establishment of a Trust which would "enable them [the Museums in their care] to be retained and improved for a secure and successful long term future within Gloucester." Good news indeed! - though GCG needs to continue to monitor this situation.

Equally pleasing was the decision of the Northampton Borough Council to not

proceed with the disposal of the geological collections. This was mooted after a 'Best Value assessment' of Northampton Museums, which highlighted the national value of their shoe and boot collection. GCG were at pains to **point** out the value and importance of the geological holdings (see Cooper and **Torrens** 1974, *Newsletter of the Geological Curators' Group* **1**(2), 40-51). In June I received a letter informing me that the museum was no longer **considering** disposal of the geological collections.

In response to an e-mail asking for assistance on behalf of the **Musée de l'Homme** in Paris which was destined for **closure** in two years time with the loss of several jobs and **uncertainty** as to the future of their important anthropological collections. I wrote on behalf of the Group to the French President and Prime Minister. Their responses talked **about** reorganisation of the museum - another situation that needs close watching.

In April we heard that following a Course Portfolio Review at Oxford **Brookes** University it was decided to close down the undergraduate Geology courses. Geology would be phased out by 2004, and this **action** would almost certainly make their geological collections non-viable. Oxford Brookes has a vast collection numbering 150,000 geological samples which includes a unique suite of Greenland rocks. An alternative repository for this material may be required, and I have written seeking further information on the present status.

Last month it was announced that Geology at Birmingham is to merged with Geography and that the Tectonics and Basins research groups will be axed with consequent loss of staff. The **palaeobiologists** will not be so affected. Nevertheless, I was concerned as to the implications for the collections of the **Lapworth** Museum. I have been told that the **Lapworth** is probably in its best position for a decade, and that efforts are being made to ensure the long-term **security** of the collections in Birmingham.

Finally, my attention was drawn to the recent disposal from a geological repository of material collected by S S **Buckman**; material which might have included types of some ammonite species. Kevin Page, who spent time as a **tutor** at an Open University summer school discovered a number of specimens for sale at a 'shop' opened at the host **university**. Material being sold included specimens originally rescued from a skip at the University of Nottingham - hence the title of this note. **After** investigation Kevin discovered that the material may have included types, and comprised some specimens collected by **Buckman**, W D Lang and others. It has been suggested that a more suitable avenue for disposal of unwanted collections would be to offer them to another institution, and to seek the advice of the GCG first. In the meantime I have written to the institution involved, and perhaps steps can be taken to **try** to retrieve any of the status specimens sold.

It is difficult to know how effective our actions have been - but as a Group we need to persevere. As the premier organisation interested in the welfare of collections we

need promote the notion amongst the museum community that these collections require looking after and that it is not the right of the present generation to indiscriminately dispose of our geological heritage assembled by past generations. The Group as a whole is in a strong position to offer its expertise to institutions where perhaps expert care is not presently available. It is a huge task; members need to keep vigilant so that when orphan, adopted or other collections come under threat, the Group can act. Ideally, this situation should not arise, but as financial cuts bite hard, it is often the disposal of collections or the closure of galleries that are seen as suitable quick-fix options. Authorities and curators need to devise imaginative ways to allow the collections to pay for themselves, perhaps through temporary exhibitions and increased exposure to the general public.
Patrick Wyse Jackson, GCG Chairman.

BCG / NSCG merger: A summary of progress to date.

GCG members may be aware of moves by our sister specialist groups, the Biology Curators' Group and the Natural Sciences Conservation Group, to merge. The invitation to merge was also extended to GCG, but your Committee felt that a merger would not be appropriate at this stage. We asked, however, to be kept informed of developments and suggested that a GCG Committee member might attend the merger discussions as an observer. However, the joint BCG/NSCG committee felt that this was not necessary, and have instead forwarded the minutes of the two meetings they have held to date. Steve Thompson, BCG Representative on GCG Committee, here reports on the progress of the merger discussions:

The merger of these two groups has been guided by a joint committee set up by the groups to see the process through. The committee consists of Kate Andrew, Paul Brown, David Carter, Nick Gordon, Howard Mendel, Simon Moore, Steve Thompson and Donna Young.

The overall aim of the merger is to create a new group which will further the aims of both groups in a more efficient and effective manner. The current aims, objectives and activities of both groups are to be explicitly represented and actively pursued by way of the constitution, committee structure, editorial activity and meetings programme of the new group.

It was hoped that GCG would also be a party to the merger, but this was decided against by the GCG committee. However, the new group will have a geological remit, not least because the NSCG already has such a remit, and looks forward to developing closer ties with GCG in the future.

The areas to be covered by the joint committee were set out at the first meeting as being the merger process, constitution, name, committee structure, charitable status, affiliations, finances and publications.

The Merger Process. Discussion was dominated by the fact that NSCG was a charity and BCG was not, although it had been considering it. A number of options were considered, and the Charities Commission was consulted. The best option was

felt to be to set up a new charity with the aims and constitution of the new group, and then to dissolve the existing groups and transfer their assets to the new group. This was the option recommended by the Commission, and would be assisted by their new application process. This would allow the new charity to be set up shortly before or after Christmas, allowing the rest of the process to be undertaken and ratified at a set of AGMs to be held at a joint meeting of the two groups in April 2003. It, therefore, met the desired timetable and rendered an irrelevance the fact that BCG was not already a charity.

Constitution. The issue of the new constitution also turned out to be much more straightforward than anticipated. This was because, as an aid to fast-tracking the application process, the Charities Commission had produced an outline constitution, with guidance on how they expected this to be completed. In fact the only areas for serious consideration were the aims and name of the new group. Discussion produced the following set of aims:

1. To raise public awareness and appreciation of the scientific and cultural value of natural sciences collections.
2. To promote the highest standards in the management, preparation, conservation, care, interpretation and research of natural sciences collections and specimens, for the benefit of the public at large and other users.
3. To encourage exchange of information between individuals and institutions about natural sciences collections and records.

Name. With regards to the name, it was felt that we needed something that stated clearly the nature of the new group, rather than something more catchy but ambiguous. The name that met with general approval was the Natural Sciences Collections Association, which would be abbreviated to NSCA or NaSCA.

Committee Structure. It was decided that a broad outline for the committee structure should be drawn up, but the finer details should be decided by the new executive committee. To this end, it was decided to adopt a committee of up to 20, including officers, ordinary members and cooptees. The officers would be the Honorary Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. The executive committee would have the power to set up such subcommittees as it felt appropriate, but the following subcommittees would be proposed at the first AGM: Membership & Publicity, Publications, Conferences & Meetings, Conservation and Collections Management. Each subcommittee would be chaired by a member of the executive committee.

Charitable Status. This was considered in the light of communications with the Charities Commission, and in the event, did not present a problem, as indicated above.

Affiliations. The particular issue here was NSCG's affiliation with the National Council for Conservation and Restoration (NCCR). However, as the aims and

activities of the NSCG are to be incorporated into those of the new group, the NCCR has indicated that it doesn't see a problem with maintaining the affiliation with the new group.

Finances and Publications. Other than allowing for the two current treasurers to arrange for the combining of the two sets of finances, it was decided that the details of the finances of the two groups would be left for the new executive committee to deal with, except for any issues that related to the setting up of the new group. Similarly, the new publications subcommittee would be charged with evolving the new publications, a stated long-term aim being to develop as appropriate a peer-reviewed journal and separate newsletter.

It had been expected that there would be some considerable difficulty in achieving the merger. In the event, discussions were very efficient and all the meetings finished earlier than expected. Let's hope that this is a sign of a healthy future for the NaSCA.

Scarborough and Whitby Museums type fossils catalogue

Both Whitby and Scarborough Museums have appreciable collections of fossils which include over 300 type specimens mainly from the Jurassic. Since the two collections complement each other, the two museums have come together to publish a joint catalogue on the internet. The advantage of this approach is that it is very cost effective, allows easy access to researchers, allows the ready incorporation of images, and is easy to update. The catalogue can be found at www.durain.demon.co.uk/type/

Hampshire geology collections online

Hampshire County Council Museum Service (HCCMS) has launched a new geological website. Accessed through the Hampshire County Council homepage, introductory pages briefly summarise the collection, collectors, the collecting policy and the staff. Illustrated pages on the fossil fauna, stratigraphy and localities provide an essential informative link to the HCCMS geological collection. The website will soon offer a link to the Modes database using the Modes web server, where a field search in record number, genus/species, stratigraphy and place will be offered. This information will be offered in data grid view, single entry view and other selective Modes fields, although some will be withheld for security reasons.

For more information, log on to www.hants.gov.uk/geology or contact David J Kemp, Keeper of Geology on 023 9258 8035.

New look Sedgwick opens

Internationally-renowned naturalist Sir David Attenborough came face to face with the world's largest spider at the re-launch of Cambridge University's Sedgwick Museum on Friday 27 September 2002. One gallery of the Museum has undergone a transformation in recent months, with fresh displays, models and new resources for visitors. In a huge renovation programme, funded by the Resource/DCMS

Designation Challenge Fund, the Museum has been made much more accessible and attractive to visitors.

Hanging over the display cases are a series of colourful mobiles, designed by kite-maker Stephen Brocket, which illustrate some of the themes and exhibits in the gallery. The Edwardian display cases have been restored and their displays sympathetically redesigned. There is a new resources area for groups and individuals with space for talks, activities and individual study.

Resources have also been provided for use in schools, with a new Teachers' Pack. The Museum also has an innovative handling trolley, with fossils, rocks and minerals for visitors to touch. Involved in the renovation project has been the Sedgwick Young Design Squad (SYDS), who have advised on many aspects of the project. They have also written and designed their own display, which includes a lifesize model of the 300 million-year-old *Megarachne*, the world's largest spider.

The refurbishment programme was supported by a £300,000 grant from the Resource/DCMS Designation Challenge Fund. The Designation Scheme was launched in 1997 with the aim of identifying and celebrating the pre-eminent collections of national and international importance held in England's non-national museums. Dr David Norman, Director of the Sedgwick Museum, said: "The Sedgwick Museum is one of the country's most important scientific resources, and we are delighted to be able to display our collections and the work that we do in such a beautiful new gallery."

Sir David Attenborough said: "Displaying rocks and fossils in cases is all very well, but lighting them beautifully and then showing how they can help us to understand the complex history of our planet is something else and these new galleries do it marvellously well. I am delighted with the changes made since I was a student member of the Sedgwick Club."

The museum has also launched its new website, www.sedgwickmuseum.org.

BGS map prices rise

On 1 October 2002, the price of British Geological Survey 1:50 000 geological maps went up by £1.05 to £11.00, having been £9.95 for the last seven years. The prices of the other map series remain as before, although the 1:100 000 geological maps of the Scottish Islands also rose to £11.00 and the Sheet Explanation Packs (which contain a 1:50 000 map and an explanatory booklet) went up to £18. The price of the booklet without the map remains unchanged at £9. For further information, call the BGS Sales Desk on 0115 936 3241 or email sales@bgs.ac.uk

New William Smith map

As the William Smith bandwagon rolls along, latest on board are BGS with a rather nice reproduction of William Smith's 1820 Geological Map of England and Wales. Titled *A New Geological Map of England and Wales, with the Inland Navigations*;

Exhibiting the Districts of Coal and other Sites of Mineral Tonnage By W Smith, Engineer. 1820, the map has been reproduced from an original in the BGS Library in Keyworth. The original is in sections, cloth-mounted and folded, but digital imaging has allowed the folds and cloth borders to be removed in this reproduction which is also colour matched to the original. It is 76.5 cm x 63.5 cm (portrait format, and the same size as the original) and is priced at £10.00. For further information, call the BGS Sales Desk on 0115 936 3241 or email sales@bgs.ac.uk

Funding problems at Dynamic Earth

According to a report in *The Herald* (19 September), Dynamic Earth, the hugely successful Millennium Commission-funded geology centre in Edinburgh is facing a serious shortfall in its finances. When it first opened in 1999, it attracted visitor numbers far in excess of expectations, unlike many other Millennium projects. However, not only are visitor numbers now tailing off, but new licensing conditions imposed by Edinburgh City Council are affecting the substantial income which the centre receives from corporate entertainment and relies upon, as it receives no public funding. This has resulted in a loss of income in excess of £100,000 this year. Dynamic Earth has applied to the city council for rate relief which could be worth £30,000 in an attempt to ensure the viability of the centre.

Spare reprints in need of a good home

The Department of Geology at the National Museum of Wales has a significant amount of duplicate copies of literature available for donation to an appropriate institution or working group. The material includes:

- Reprints on brachiopods, the Mesozoic, stratigraphy and corals.
- A miscellaneous reprint collection (>450 titles) containing publications by A. J. Boucot, T. N. George, C. H. Holland, A. Martinsson, and many others. Subjects include: brachiopods, cephalopods, ostracods, stratigraphy, and the Lower Palaeozoic.
- Many assorted books and journal parts

Itemised lists are available on request; please contact Val Deisler on 029 20 573282 or email Val.Deisler@nmgw.ac.uk

Newish publications

Rex appeal. The amazing story of Sue, the dinosaur that changed science, the law and my life by Peter L Larson and Kirstin Donnan, 2002. IPG (Invisible Cities Press), 384pp. ISBN 1 931 229074, £23.50.

Geology and landscapes of Scotland by Con Gillen, 2002. Terra Publishing, 256pp. ISBN 1 903544 09 2, £19.95.

The north of Ireland. Classic geology in Europe: 5 by Paul Lyle, 2002. Terra Publishing, 160pp. ISBN 1 903544 08 4, £11.95.

The geology of Scotland edited by N H Trewin, 2002. 4th edition, London: Geological

- Society, 550pp. ISBN 1 86239 105 X (hardback), £85.00; ISBN 1 86239 126 2 (paperback), £27.50.
- The geology of Spain* edited by W Gibbons and T Moreno, 2002. London: Geological Society, 632pp. ISBN 1 86239 110 (hardback), £85.00; ISBN 1 86239 127 0 (paperback), £27.50.
- Earth, water, ice and fire: two hundred years of geological research in the English Lake District* by D R Oldroyd, 2002. London: Geological Society Memoir 25, 320pp. ISBN 1 86239 107 6, £85.00.
- British Regional Geology. The Pennines and adjacent areas* by N Aitkenhead, 2002. 4th edition. Keyworth: British Geological Survey ISBN 0 852724 24 1, £18.00.
- Perspectives on object-centred learning in museums* edited by S G Paris, 2002. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum. ISBN 0 805839 27 5, £74.95.
- Curious Bones: Mary Anning and the Birth of Paleontology* by Thomas W Goodhue, 2002. Morgan Reynolds, 112 pages. ISBN 1 883846 93 5, \$21.95.

New children's biography of Mary Anning

The Rev. Thomas W Goodhue, Executive Director of the Long Island Council of Churches, in the United States, has just published a biography of Mary Anning, *Curious Bones: Mary Anning and the Birth of Paleontology* (see Newish publications, above). "Hers is a remarkable story," Goodhue says, "but she remains little-known". Her life spanned a crucial period in the growth of geology (1799 to 1847). "She was poor but formed friendships with wealthy collectors", Goodhue adds. "Uneducated, she influenced the development of science. Unable to vote, she helped bring down the corrupt political machine which dominated her town. She was deeply pious, but her discoveries disturbed the beliefs of millions of people. I've always been interested in both science and religion, and Anning shows how complex this relationship is". Goodhue began researching this early 19th century scientific pioneer while teaching at the Riverside Church Weekday School. There were countless books for young children about prehistoric creatures, but nearly none about any other female paleontologists. Unable to find an account of her life, Goodhue began writing one himself. "It turned into an obsession," he confesses. He first wrote about Anning for the teachers' magazine *Instructor* and then included a children's sermon about her in *Sharing the Good News with Children*, his collection of stories for the Franciscans. Articles followed about her religious life for Episcopal publications in the US (*Anglican & Episcopal History*), Canada (*Anglican Journal*), and Britain (*Church Times*), plus one for *Northeastern Environmental & Geological Sciences* and invitations to speak at scholarly conferences in the US and England.

While *Curious Bones* is a short book, it is the most complete account yet of Anning's life and times yet published and the only one to deal with her emotional and spiritual life. With a glossary and time-lines, it is intended to be a book which older children and teenagers can read, but it also includes an index and references which scholars can use for further study.

Canterbury Fossil Roadshow

This popular annual one-day event will focus on the last Ice Age in Kent and feature early man's flint tools and the bones of mammoth and woolly rhinoceros. Local fossil and mineral groups, including the Oyster Coast Fossil Society, Medway Lapidary and Mineral Society, and the Sheppey Fossil Study Group, who have given enthusiastic support to the Roadshow over the past four years, will all be exhibiting new fossil finds from the local area. As usual, a team of experts will be on hand to identify mystifying objects brought in by the public, which don't always turn out to be fossils, rocks or minerals!

There will also be several fun activities and events, suitable for both children and adults, such as microfossils under the microscope, seeing sponges that make flint, finding real fossil shark teeth, and we hope to have a flint knapper making stone tools.

Free gifts too! For the first 100 children attending the Roadshow, there will be a sample of mammoth tusk or flint. The Roadshow takes place on Saturday 11 January 2003 at the Royal Museum, High Street, Canterbury, Kent from 10.00 to 12.30 and 13.00 to 16.00. Admission is free.

A temporary geological curator's tale

It is a few years since there has been any permanent geology display at Clifton Park Museum in Rotherham, its place being occupied by the collection of Rockingham Pottery which, although locally and internationally important is very unattractive.

A piece of good news in this respect is that once the museum has been completely refurbished (commencing later this year), there are plans to bring back geology into the public domain, at least as the foundations of a new display on local natural history. Furthermore, another step has been taken in the right direction with the cataloguing of the mineral and education collections.

With a fixed 6 month contract to work with, the task was initially to identify, label and classify 1300 mineral specimens according to the Strunz system and pack them in display quality boxes for future use, with further plans to continue with the rocks and fossils within the next financial year. With news of a successful HLF bid for the museum refurbishment received within two days of the contract starting, these plans have inevitably been turned upside down, so my role as resident, albeit temporary, geologist has been to fill in the gaps and think of some new ideas.

Although the permanent geology collections have been in chaos for decades, the Museum education Service has methodically and scientifically upgraded its independent collection and whilst education in the Earth Sciences has taken a battering in recent years, it has been encouraging to discover that Rotherham possesses a first class teaching resource that could easily be used for primary to adult levels of education, given the funding and the will.

One way of realising the potential is for the museum to follow the example of the

South Yorkshire RIGS Group which has already selected sites in Rotherham which are suitable for fieldwork and highlight architectural, ecological and archaeological interests. Another is to capitalise upon the recently published English Heritage Teacher Information Leaflet, *Building in stone*, which encourages schools to experience the English Heritage Properties in Care and learn all about the geology, the landscape and its exploitation for building materials, which have stood the test of time, in many instances for thousands of years.

Clifton Park Museum itself provides an excellent opportunity to learn not only about the historic interest of this wealthy industrialist's house, but the building materials and the grounds in which it is set, where formal parkland, ridge and furrow topography and natural escarpments compete with Roman remains for the best view.

Another development is the interest of secondary school art teachers. The new Ruskin Gallery in Sheffield provides a truly outstanding example of how the colours and textures of the natural world have influenced Ruskin and his contemporaries.

Geology itself may no longer attract mainstream science but there is no reason why provincial museums should not adopt similar strategies and inspire another generation of artists to appreciate banded agate, fire opals and specular hematite. After all, another William Morris or Edward Burne-Jones may be waiting in the wings.

Scott Engering

**GCG / GIG seminar
British Geological Survey, Keyworth
15 May 2002**

More than 60 people attended the Geological Collections Databases Meeting (held jointly with the Geoscience Information Group) at the leafy British Geological Survey in Keyworth, Nottingham. The meeting started with the usual coffee and biscuits then was opened by David Falvey of BGS who talked about the usefulness of databases in making information about collections so much more accessible to everyone.

Alan Mackenzie then started the talks with the BGS's own web site. Due to an Act of Parliament requiring various governmental and industrial bodies to hand over details of boreholes, the BGS now have over 1 million borehole records. In 1998 when new software became available, they started to look at placing their data on the web. After examining different packages, Alan explained that they decided to develop their own site internally using ArcIMS for various reasons (prior knowledge of products, free software etc). However, perhaps the most useful adaptation was that it is a package for directly linking the web site to the database so that changes are immediately present on the web with out needing updates. The talk concluded with a look at the web site on www.bgs.ac.uk/geindex/home.html. The Geoscience Data Index (GDI) consists of a selectable map of the UK down to street level and a numerous number of overlays from the various BGS collections.

Borehole locations, mines, metalliferous localities, site investigations etc can all be plotted on the selected area. Other useful educational additions are backgrounds showing the geology, Landsat images, fossil localities etc. At its current level this system was reported to have cost around £30,000 for software, hardware and OS maps and then staff time of 5 x 120 days.

Adrian Rissoné then reported on the Natural History Museum (NHM) palaeontology database. Though the current database was adequate there were a number of small problems (such as the year 2000) that resulted in the decision to revamp the entire system. As the NHM contains the largest biological research institute in the UK the database had to be a highly sophisticated collection management package with multi-capabilities. There were over 500 fields to cope with and extra desirables such as the ability to use multinational characters, or to add notes in with dates instead of having fixed date fields. Further, due to a large number of departmental staff, it was necessary to be able to produce a good audit trail for tracking changes. The end result is a flexible database from a company called UniData, which uses hierarchies and allows multi-entries; for example, more than one entry can be made for specimen names in a single record. This database allows direct printing of reports, labels and publications. Adrian finished his talk by discussing the possible future use of this database by others and the ability to merge and share data and whether this would require international database standards. (See www.nhm.ac.uk/palaeontology/ for information about the different collections)

John Faithfull from the University of Glasgow Museum then talked about his experiences of setting up web sites and questioned the apparent lack of geological collections on the web. He went through possible reasons for this. Did institutions feel that they needed more staff? Did they worry about needing expensive software, hardware? Were they waiting until their catalogues were complete? Were there worries about security? Were they waiting to decide who it would be aimed at? John then told us that there were ways round all of these problems. Almost any computer could run as a stand-alone and therefore secure server, much of the required software is free, and most databases can be exported into a suitable format, and it shouldn't take much time to do (6 minutes was mentioned at one point! The web site www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk/inca/seekform.htm has some examples of some straightforward databases.

We then broke for lunch with the opportunity to view close up most of the databases talked about during the meeting including a petrology database from the NHM and the BGS photographic database (www.bgs.ac.uk/scripts/photoarchive/check.cfm)

After lunch Joe MacQuaker showed us a different sort of database that was research based instead of specimen orientated. BASELINE was developed at the University of Manchester Museum to help researchers label their data properly so that it could be used again in the future; to help in relating scales; and to show gaps in data sets. In this instance Joe had used Mac hardware and 4D as it is very rapid, web conformable and free to educational institutes. The result was a

database able to link research at different levels. We were shown an example where a picture of a cliff face had pins pointing to the exact origin of specimens and then so on down the scale to a picture of a polished section with a pin pointing to a microprobe analysis spot. The database was already proving useful for teaching purposes.

Next Tim McCormick talked about the latest developing BGS database termed 'Palaeosaurus'. After 150 years of collecting, over a million specimens exist and at the time of the meeting 14,500 specimens have been placed on the database. There was a brief discussion of stratigraphy problems as labels written at certain times will contain the terminology of that time period and may have been updated since. This can be partly ameliorated by the use of another BGS web site: www.bgs.ac.uk/lexicon/lexicon_intro.html where there is a 'rock lexicon' that shows the current approved hierarchies for stratigraphical units.

The sixth talk was by Paul Britton who introduced us to a sophisticated data-crunching package for biostratigraphy. Data from oil wells such as fossils, geophysics etc. could all be added to the database and the results plotted as logs and distribution charts. Correlation lines could then be drawn between wells. The data had the potential to be exportable and other data importable though there were problems with non-standard terminology between different oil companies. It was currently being successfully sold to many companies.

Jana Horák then talked about the experience the National Museum of Wales had when choosing a database for the geology department. In this case a package called Mobydoc was purchased that could be moulded to cover all of the departments in the museum from industry to art. The department of geology started adding specimens to a geological front end in 1994 and it is now almost complete with about 250,000 geological specimens recorded. The initial push in the museum was to become more accountable for registered specimens however the database chosen supports images and sound and now the push from the regional government is towards making the records publicly accessible. Because of the complexities of extensive changes to Welsh Counties in 1972, recent changes to Regional Authorities and dual English/Welsh place names current work is looking at use of a GIS system to display the data using grid references instead of place name searches.

Our eighth speaker of the day was Kevin Walsh who spoke about the online collections at the Oxford University Museum (www.oum.ox.ac.uk/collson.htm) For this particular project the museum used Microsoft Access for the database as it was low cost, familiar and data was convertible for web use. This has so far enabled the collections to be available to the public as several different databases using straightforward searchable fields. Before placing information on line the data was checked for accuracy and only a limited number of fields are actually displayed on the site. The use of Access means that the data has to be updated every now and then as new versions are developed and it is hoped in future to link some of the information to educational information in the future.

Finally, Giles Miller regaled us with the NHM attempts to firstly acquire and then computerise the microfossil collections previously held at Aberystwyth. The collections consist of many different types of objects from PhD thesis to over 56,000 slides. The online database is at: www.flood.nhm.ac.uk/cgi-bin/earth/abermicro/. Again, Microsoft Access was used to create a straightforward database with no hierarchical relationships.

At the end of the meeting we were able to view the stores at BGS. Starting with the records room where everything from core logs to field slips and notebooks are all collated, we saw some mine plans that had been used in a legal case to show that proof of the shaft locations did exist. Then we moved on to the huge purpose built core stores allegedly holding a core from County Durham that reached over 13,000 feet! After this we moved round the various rock and palaeontology stores viewing some of Darwin's specimens on route.

At the end of the day we all came away from the meeting knowing more about the different databases available and the decisions that need to be considered when selecting them. It was interesting to note that nearly everyone presenting had developed different styles of database for different needs from specific collections to multidisciplinary management systems. Hopefully many more collections will be available to search on the web in the future.

Grateful thanks are extended to all the speakers and especially the staff at BGS who took time to cater for us and show us their wares.

Helen Kerbey,
National Museum of Wales

Forthcoming GCG seminars and workshops

27 November 2002 The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester
GCG Workshop: Identifying fossils 3: Corals
PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS WORKSHOP HAS BEEN POSTPONED.

28 November-2 December 2002 Humboldt Museum, Berlin, Germany
GCG Study visit

This study visit is now fully booked, but if you would like to make your own travel and accommodation arrangements and join us at the museum, please contact Ros Gourgey tel 01371 810832, email rosgourgey@212.com to let her know that you are coming.

10-11 December 2002 Sedgwick Museum, Downing Street, Cambridge.
GCG Seminar, AGM and study visit: A new look at geological displays.

There have been numerous museum redevelopments over recent years, many of which have included new interpretations of geology collections. What is the audience that individual museums are trying to reach, and are there significantly different approaches and philosophies? How are collections interfacing with interpretative techniques and indeed how are these techniques changing? This

seminar will give participants the opportunity to discuss the current trends, if any, in geological displays in museums.

Tuesday 10 December : Sedgwick Museum

- 1000 Registration and coffee and biscuits
- 1030 Welcome from the Sedgwick Museum and Department of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge
- 1040 *A little gem!! New geology displays in Tyne and Wear Museums*: Steve McLean (Hancock Museum, Tyne and Wear Museums)
- 1110 Starting from scratch: the Johnson Geocentre, Newfoundland: Tom Sharpe (National Museum of Wales)
- 1145 Dinosaur Isle - interpreting geology in the age of Walking with Dinosaurs: Martin Munt (Dinosaur Isle)
- 1215 Discussion
- 1230 Lunch
- 1400 Bringing Earth Science exhibits at the Natural History Museum to life - a mineralogist's perspective: Alan Hart (Natural History Museum)
- 1430 Darwin's influence on petrology displays at the Natural History Museum: Dave Smith (Natural History Museum)
- 1500 Redeveloping the Sedgwick Museum - the changing face of the palaeozoic wing after nearly a century: Liz Hide and Leslie Noè (Sedgwick Museum)
- 1530 Discussion
- 1545 Tea and biscuits
- 1600 GCG 29th Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 11 December : Sedgwick Museum

- 1000 Tour around the Sedgwick Museum, including the Palaeozoic Wing redevelopment followed by time for the delegates to peruse the new exhibition.
- 1100 Tea/Coffee
- 1130 Discussion in the gallery of the redevelopment, partly leading on from the previous day's presentation.
- 1200 Lunch
- 1330 Transport to and tour around the Brighton Building - the Earth Science Department's purpose-built conservation, preparation, storage and archive facility.
- 1500 Return to Dept of Earth Sciences. Meeting Ends.

For details of accommodation in Cambridge see www.cambridge.gov.uk/leisure/TICWEB/accommodation.htm

There is a meeting fee of £6.00 per day (so £12.00 for both days) which includes coffee, tea and buffet lunches. Please complete the booking form on page 19 and send it, with payment (cheques payable to the Geological Curators' Group) to Leslie Noè, Sedgwick Museum, Department of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EQ.

Other meetings

14-18 July 2003 Department of Geology, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland INHIGEO International Commission on the History of Geological Sciences 28th Symposium: Geological travellers

The programme will comprise 4 days of talks and poster sessions on the theme of Geological travellers. The symposium language will be English.

The optional post-symposium field trip will take place between Saturday 19th – Saturday 26th July 2003 and will involve an anticlockwise circumnavigation around Ireland during which some classic areas of Irish geology will be examined. A number of these sites hold particular significance in the history of geology. Sites to be visited may include the Giant's Causeway in north east Ireland; the Donegal granite upon which much of the debate of the granite controversy of the 1950s was debated, Cregg Castle the ancestral home of the celebrated mineralogist and chemist Richard Kirwan; the Burren in County Clare a site of exceptional beauty in karstic limestones; Cashel, Co. Tipperary - an important early Christian site; the River Blackwater valley where J.B. Jukes examined the nature of Tertiary river drainage patterns; and Hook Head in the southeast corner of the country where Captain Thomas Austin described wonderful Lower Carboniferous crinoids. The trip will be led by Patrick Wyse Jackson and will be joined by Gordon Herries Davies for part of the trip. Numbers will be limited to 3 persons.

Estimated costs are: Registration fee: c.€380, Accompanying members: €100. Accommodation: c. €58 per night. Field trip: €500 per person.

Further details including the 1st Circular, Registration Form, Details of abstract submission, and the Post-Symposium excursion are available on the Web site: www.tcd.ie/Geology/ or from the convenor, Dr Patrick N. Wyse Jackson, Department of Geology, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland. Tel: 353-1-6081477; Fax: 353-1-6711199; e-mail: wysjcknp@tcd.ie.

24-26 September 2003 Centre Alexandre Koyré, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Université Paris I-Sorbonne

Correspondence and the history of biology (18th-20th centuries)

Contact: Nicholas Robin & Josquin Debaz, Laboratoire de cryptagamie, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 12 rue Buffon, 75005 Paris, France email corresponances@voila.fr

BCG Study Trip to Kenya, 2003

BCG are looking at the possibility of arranging a study visit to Nairobi, Kenya next year. I am hoping that the basic cost of the trip (return flight and 5-6 nights accommodation) will be around £500, but would warn that it could be significantly more. There may well be additional costs, (transport inside Kenya, jabs (possibly not necessary), etc). I would expect to spend 6 days in Kenya, and hopefully visit at least one of the sites outside of Nairobi. For those of you who would like to see what the potential is, have a look at www.museums.or.ke. I am hoping that we will

get out of Nairobi to see at least a little of what Africa is about.

This is a trip that will take a considerable amount of organising, even with help at the Kenya end, (which I now have). I do not intend to follow this up in detail if there does not seem to be sufficient interest, so I am asking those of you who would be seriously interested in such a trip to contact me, as soon as possible. Telephone 01724 843533, e-mail steve.thompson@northlincs.gov.uk, or write North Lincs Museum, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, North Lincs, DN15 7BD.
Steve Thompson

**GCG Seminar and AGM Sedgwick Museum, Cambridge
10-11 December 2002
BOOKING FORM**

Title.....Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone.....

e-mail.....

I will be attending the seminar on 10 December

I will be attending on 11 December

I enclose a cheque, payable to GCG, for £6/12*

* delete where appropriate

Please return this booking form to Leslie Noè , Sedgwick Museum, Department of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EQ tel 01223 333456, email lnoe01@esc.cam.ac.uk

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UK subscribers are encouraged to complete the Standing Order form, and are reminded that subscriptions to the *Geological Curator* are tax deductible.

Please complete this form and return it, with payment or with the Standing Order form by 1 January 2003 to: Giles Miller, GCG Secretary, Department of Palaeontology, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK

Members in North America should complete this form and send it, with a check for US \$23.00 payable to the Geological Curators' Group, to Tiffany Adrain, Department of Geoscience, The University of Iowa, 121 Trowbridge Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242.

Data Protection Act 1998

The Data Protection Act 1998 requires GCG to inform its members that it keeps personal data about them in computerised and manual filing systems. Personal data about members is held and processed only for the purposes of maintaining a mailing list for the distribution of *The Geological Curator*, *Coprolite*, membership renewal reminders and other information that may be of interest to members; organising workshops, seminars and other events; conducting specific member surveys such as the 2001 State and Status Survey; accounting purposes and statistical analysis and other functions necessary for the management and activities of GCG. Occasionally information may be shared with NSCG, BCG and other similar organisations for the purpose of those organisations sending GCG members information that may interest them, eg notification of workshops, seminars and conferences.

At intervals we publish membership lists in *Coprolite* for the benefit of our members. Any members who do not wish their details to be published are asked to contact the Secretary who will then remove their names and details from the published list.

We intend this year to introduce new subscription payment methods, such as standing orders. Any financial information members provide for such purposes will only be used for the purposes of collecting and monitoring subscriptions and will not be shared with third parties with the exception of the banks/building societies associated with the transactions.