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Chairman's Report

2006 has been a year of consolidation for the ongoing projects undertaken by GCG and a time of **forging** and maintaining links with other professional bodies. **Progress has been made** on the related themes of the back issues of the *Geological Curator* and the long term storage of our archive. The back issues of the journal are, **at present**, housed **in** Trinity College, Dublin and the Manchester Museum. They take up a lot of space, but we now know exactly how many **copies** of each issue we hold. In **the coming year** we **aim to** reduce the physical stock **that** we hold, with lots of never-to-be-repeated offers to the membership. **The plan then** is to digitize the complete run of *Geological Curator* and make it available on **our** web site. **The duration of** this project will **be dependent upon** the amount of time we **are able to devote to** it, but **we consider it to be** a worthwhile endeavor. We are in preliminary discussions with the University of Leicester **regarding** the transfer of GCG's archives to their collections. I think this would be a most appropriate place for our archives to reside as, of course, Leicester was where the inaugural meeting of GCG **took place**.

The group is **now** represented on **a number of** professional committees: Roy Clements represents the group on the Collections Advisory Committee of the British Geological Society, having taken over this role from Phil Doughty. Steve Thompson is our link to the Natural Sciences via the committee of NatSCA and is invited to attend all GCG committee meetings. Mike Howe **has** attended meetings of the Scientific Committee of the Geological Society. Our representation at these meetings is important to the group and we are looking forward to **involvement** in the Bicentennial celebrations of the Geol Soc in 2007. Dale Johnston reports back to the group from the Earth Science Education Forum meetings **that** he attends on our behalf. I wish to extend thanks from the group to all of these people for the work they do on our behalf.

It is important that any items of interest are quickly distributed to the members and that we have a **reliable** mechanism for discussion of any relevant items. Information exchange is encouraged by our publications and **the** use of the Geo-Curators e-mail discussion list, which seems to be working quite well, with **members** having their queries answered quickly and positively. The redesigned web site is kept up to date by David Gelsthorpe. It contains details of the programme of meetings and publications. Please take a look at it.

There have been a number of resignations from the Committee this year: Patrick Wyse Jackson has resigned as Editor of the *Geological Curator*. He took over the editorship at the AGM in 1993, **starting** with Volume 6, Number 1(1994). Patrick will have overseen the production of 26 issues in total, **concluding** with Volume 8, number 6. On behalf of the Group I would like to extend our appreciation for the hard work and careful expertise that Patrick has brought to the role. However, Patrick will not be finishing his work on behalf of GCG as he is the Editor of the 2nd edition of the *Guidelines for the Curation of Geological Materials* which will be published by the Geological Society. Helen Kerbey has resigned her post as Treasurer and we wish her well in her new home in America. Camilla Nichol has stepped down from her role as web editor. She is to be thanked for her hard work in setting up the new site.

A thought to finish on: Subject Specialist Network - what is GCG if not exactly this.

Mandy Edwards, Manchester

A.G Brighton Medal

Every 3 years, GCG awards its Brighton Medal to a worthy geological curator. *This year's award will take place at the AGM in Dublin on 3 December.* The medal, which was instituted in 1992, commemorates the work of Albert G. Brighton, Curator at the Sedgwick Museum between 1931 and 1968. In that time he catalogued some 375,000 specimens at an average rate of over 10,000 a year.

The Brighton Medal is awarded to someone who has devoted a significant part of their working life to the actual care of geological specimens, or who has introduced innovations which have led to significant improvements in the care of geological specimens or who, through their example or by teaching (including writing) has inspired others to the better care of geological specimens. It might also be awarded to those who have fostered an increased awareness of the value of geological collections, for example, through collections research. Its aim is to recognise achievement over a long period and therefore it will normally be given to a senior curator.

The terms of reference preclude any formal nominations, public discussions or ballots, either within GCG as a whole or within GCG Committee. The medallist will be a counselled choice of the Chairman. At the next GCG Committee meeting, the names of a medal advisory panel, comprising four senior members of the Group, will be agreed. This panel will not include current members of Committee. The Chairman will choose the medallist on the basis of informal discussions with the members of the panel.

We begin the process of selection of a medallist at this AGM by inviting informal suggestions, with a supporting written statement, for possible medallists to be sent direct to the Chairman, Mandy Edwards, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL. Tel 0161 275 3825 Fax 0161 275 3947 email mandy.edwards@man.ac.uk

The full terms of reference and rules for awarding A.G. Brighton Medals can be found in *The Geological Curator*, **5**(8), pp.331-332.

New members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Hilary Blagbrough**, British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge; **Jodie Fisher**, University of Plymouth; **Jackie Tweddle**, Shrewsbury; **Sarah Glynn**, Hancock Museum; and **Letizia Del Favero**, Museo di Geologia e Paleontologia, Università di Padova.

Musical curators

Roger Clark, Curator of Geology in Bristol City Museum, retired in October 2006; **Tim Ewin** Assistant Curator of Geology at Bristol is now responsible for the geological collections at Bristol; **Brian Page**, GCG's first Editor and an Honorary Member of the Group, is leaving the UK to live in France; **Stuart Monro**, scientific director of Our Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh has been awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours List.

Exhibitions 2006-2007

Dino Jaws Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London until 15 April 2007

GCG Committee 2007

Chairman: Mandy Edwards, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL. Tel 0161 275 3825 Fax 0161 275 3947 email mandy.edwards@man.ac.uk

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tony.morgan@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

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Cindy Howells, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NP. Tel 02920 573354 Fax 029 20 667332 email cindy.howells@museumwales.ac.uk

Co-opted Members:

David Gelsthorpe, Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL. Tel 0161 2752660 Fax 0161 2752676 email David.gelsthorpe@manchester.ac.uk

David Craven, Curator of Geology, Bolton Museums, Art Gallery and Aquarium, Le Mans Crescent, Bolton, Greater Manchester, BL1 1SE Tel 01204 338764/557661 Fax 01204 332241 email david.craven@bolton.gov.uk

NatSCA representative: Steve Thompson, Museum of North Lincolnshire, Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, DN15 7BD. Tel 01724 843533 Fax 01724 270474 email Steve.Thompson@northlincs.gov.uk

Newish publications

Fossils. A photographic field guide by Chris and Helen Pellant, 2007. London: New Holland, ISBN 978 1 84537 336 8, 144pp. £14.99

Robbing the sparry garniture: a 200 year history of British mineral dealers by Michael P Cooper, 2007. The Mineralogical Record, 358pp. \$49.00

Fossil, mineral and gem shows

17-18 March Kempton Park Racecourse *Staines Road East (A308) Sunbury on Thames, West London*

31 March - 1 April Brighton Racecourse, *Freshfield Road, Brighton*

14-15 April Chilford Hall, *Linton, Cambridge*

21-22 April Newark Showground, *Winthorpe, Newark, Notts.*

19-20 May Alexandra Palace, Wood Green, London

2-3 June Norfolk Showground, *Costessy, Norwich.*

9-10 June Kempton Park Racecourse, *Staines Road East (A308) Sunbury on Thames, West London.*

16-17 June Newcastle Racecourse, *High Gosforth Park, Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

For further information contact Rock and Gem Ltd, PO Box 72, Maidenhead SL6 7GB tel 01628 621697 email info@rockngem.co.uk www.rockngem.co.uk

HLF success for Darwin at the Sedgwick

The Sedgwick Museum of Geology in Cambridge has been awarded £519,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to celebrate the geological work of Charles Darwin. There will be a new permanent exhibition on Darwin's work as a geologist and displaying the museum's unique collection of rock and mineral specimens collected by Darwin during his voyage on HMS Beagle. The exhibition, associated publications and activities will place the Sedgwick at the heart of the celebrations in 2009 to mark the bicentenary of Darwin's birth, and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The origin of species*.

The grant provides for the complete cleaning, conservation and cataloguing of the collection, improved storage and refurbished display cases. Digitised images of the specimens and their associated documentation will be developed as a web-based resource. Two new posts have been created to manage the project for 30 months from April 2007, and these were advertised in the February issue of Museums Journal, along with an 18-month assistant conservator/curator post.

Advertisers and sponsors sought

We are looking for sponsors and advertisers for both *Geological Curator* and *Coprolite*. If you would like to advertise in the journal or newsletter, or to sponsor an issue, or perhaps a meeting, or if you can suggest who we might approach about advertising and sponsorship, please let us know.

Contact: Mike Howe, British Geological Survey, Kingsley Dunham Centre, Keyworth, Nottingham NG12 5GG. Tel 0115 936 3105 Fax 0115 936 3200 email mhowe@bgs.ac.uk

Can you help with some info for our website?

With the new improved GCG website up and running, we are keen to include as much useful information as possible for geological curators. It's felt that a listing of curatorial materials and equipment suppliers, preparators, model makers and scenic artists would be of value. If you have any recommendations, please send details to Hannah Chalk, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL. Tel 0795 6208704 email Hannah-lee.Chalk@manchester.ac.uk

Rotunda: The William Smith Museum of Geology a progress report

The redevelopment of the Rotunda Museum in Scarborough as 'The William Smith Museum of Geology' entered a new and exciting phase with the start of building work on the site in September last year. This followed a massive fundraising exercise led by Lord Derwent, whose direct ancestor, Sir John Johnstone, employed Smith on his Hackness Estate in the 1820s. Over £4 million has so far been raised, including 1.9 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £500 000 from the European Regional Development Fund and £1.4 million from the private sector, including £300 000 from Shell.

The museum originally housed the collections of the Scarborough Philosophical Society, including a strong geology collection, but despite its unique connection with William Smith long ago ceased to do so. The redevelopment will restore it to its original purpose, but with 21st century techniques developed by the in house team and Event Communications Ltd to compliment the 19th Century spaces. The museum initially consisted of a single circular building, the 'rotunda', which was built under Smith's guidance and opened in 1829. Two wings were added in 1860. When the builders moved in it was discovered that one of the wings had deeper foundations than expected, the other had unexpectedly shallow ones, while the central Rotunda had none! That is now to be underpinned. The garden that was banked up against the basement wall at the front of the building has been removed and a new entrance is being constructed at basement level. This will provide room for a museum shop and toilets. The visitor will then move up a floor via a newly installed lift to the 'orientation space' on the ground floor, from which they can move into either wing or continue upwards to the top floor Rotunda Gallery.

One wing will form **Shell Geology Now**, which will incorporate state of the art displays on various aspects of modern geology developed in partnership with academic experts, including the Speeton Plesiosaur, Dinosaur Footprints, Coastal Erosion and Hydrocarbon exploration. The other gallery will form a **Gateway to the Dinosaur Coast**, with interactive displays allowing the visitor what to see where, how to identify local fossils, and to provide information about other events, activities and venues that explore the geology of the coast and how it influences everything that has happened on the coast. The main circular Rotunda Gallery will explore Smith's achievements, the birth of geology in Scarborough, early coastal geologists, the building of the museum and why it could all only have happened in Scarborough! The gallery will retain the 'wow' factor with its curved showcases redisplayed with hundreds of fossils alongside some of the best social and natural history objects in the collections.

In addition to the displays in the museum itself, the adjacent gardens are being redesigned with a geological theme, to incorporate 'fossil' trees such as the auracarians, dinosaurs, and a stone quarry. But we will also be taking geology out to the wider public, through such events as an enlarged (and now permanent) Dinosaur Coast programme, loans to schools, and talks by eminent geologists to the Rotunda Geology Group – a newly formed, informal 'friends' group. Other spin off projects include the appointment of Ann Ainsworth as Trainee Geology Conservator funded by the HLF and PRISM to conserve all the geology collections. Ann has joined us from Norfolk and has enjoyed training at the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, before returning to Scarborough to tackle years of dirt and grime!

Currently, the Scarborough Museums and Art Gallery service is under the control of Scarborough Borough Council. But with the Council's strong and enthusiastic support, an independent Scarborough Museums Trust has been set up, with Lord Derwent as Chair and Professor Peter Rawson as Deputy Chair. The Trust has just appointed a Chief Executive, Shirley Collier, who is joining us from the Imperial War Museum. Other Museum staff will transfer to the Trust at that time, though ownership of the buildings and collections will remain with the Council.

The Rotunda will reopen in early 2008 and along with the other developments mentioned above will mark a remarkable transformation in geological provision at Scarborough Museums, with a £4million museum, a permanent geologist on staff and fully conserved collections the future is certainly looking brighter!
Pete Rawson (Scarborough Museums Trust) and Will Watts (Scarborough Museums and Art Gallery Service).

Geologist

From Uncyclopedia, the content-free encyclopaedia

Geologists are scientists with an unnatural obsession with rocks and alcohol. Often too stupid to do proper science like chemistry or physics, geologists instead devote their time to mud-worrying, volcano spotting and high-risk colouring in. One of the main difficulties in communicating with geologists is their belief that a million years is a short amount of time. Consequently, such abstract concepts as "Tuesday Morning" and "Lunchtime" are completely beyond their comprehension.

To spot a geologist in the wild, look for:

Hand-lens, compass, pen-knife, handcuffs etc. tied round neck with string.

Ownership of a pet rock (in the case of palaeontologists, this will be their closest friend).

Over-enthusiasm on the subject of dinosaurs.

Someone explaining to airport security that a rock hammer isn't really a weapon.

Takes photos, includes people only for scale, and has more pictures of his rock hammer and lens cap than of his family.

Someone with collection of beer cans/bottles rivals the size of his rock collection.

Someone who brings beer instead of water when hiking.

Someone with unnatural amounts of facial hair and wears lots of polar fleece

Someone whose lunch consists of rocks, instead of ordinary bread

Someone who eats dirt and claims to be "getting an estimate of grain size"

Someone who considers a "recent event" to be anything that has happened in the last hundred thousand years

They look at the scenery and tell you how it was formed

They have more pairs of walking boots than shoes

Their pockets tend to be filled with bits of rock

If you remain unsure, ask the subject to draw an annotated diagram of a trilobite. A true geologist will immediately reach for their waterproof notebook - this is your opportunity for escape.

Geologists and Alcohol

There is a considerable, and still growing body of scientific literature that suggests that geologists are in fact the world's first alcohol-based life form. Owing to a crucial imbalance in blood electrolyte levels (possibly caused by overexposure to bad *rock* puns) most find it necessary to imbibe vast quantities of alcoholic beverages at every opportunity. If you ever encounter a geologist who is sober after 6pm, this person is an impostor: possibly an alien; probably a geographer. Alcoholism is an acceptable, even socially beneficial, disease for an active geologist. The mark of a true geologist is the ability to draw up a systematic and colour coded diagrammatic representation of good beer distribution across the globe, using no more than a tatty beer mat and burnt twig. Alternative conversation topics might include: a detailed consideration of the relative merits of differing brands of gin (including those brands that may only be termed "*gin*" as "*bug-infused lighter fuel*" might look bad on the risk assessment forms); whether a hangover is *very useful* or *absolutely essential* to the correct practice of geology in the field; and how many crates of beer does it take to cause the average 4x4 to roll over/dump its rear axle/spontaneously combust.

For more of this, check out <http://uncyclopedia.org/wiki/Geologist>

Fossils held in scientific darkness now have a new lease on life

For several decades a controversy over the ability to publish research on privately held fossils has been brewing among members of the palaeontological community. A coalition of private and public palaeontologists have banded together to find a solution to this long-standing dilemma. This month, a new online journal called the "Journal of Paleontological Sciences" (JPS) is scheduled to be released that addresses the concerns of academia, helps bridge the gap between private and public palaeontologists and allows for the publication of privately held fossil specimens.

Some academic palaeontologists are concerned that scientifically significant fossil specimens, held in private hands, may become inaccessible to researchers. Specimens held in private hands are often more difficult to track and there are concerns that those specimens might become lost to science either by disappearing

through sale, trade, loan, inheritance or by the private title holders refusing access. Many mainstream palaeontological journals (such as the "Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology, Journal of Paleontology, etc.) do not publish on privately held specimens for these reasons. The Association of Applied Paleontological Sciences (AAPS) thinks it has found an answer to this dilemma. According to Dr. Ken Carpenter, curator for the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, "Lurking in many private collections are valuable fossil treasures, which remain unknown to the rest of the world. This is the first journal that gives an outlet to the amateur and commercial palaeontologist to try their hand at writing a scientific article." Walter Stein, chairman of the JPS Publication Committee, states, "This current publication ban has resulted in nearly every privately held specimen to become effectively "lost to science" since no data or very little data on them can currently be published in the mainstream scientific journals. Since literally thousands of important specimens (including dinosaur, fossil mammal, bird, fish, marine reptile, invertebrate, etc.) are currently held in private hands and some will no doubt remain private indefinitely, a great deal of data that could be accessed is not being researched sufficiently. It's simple," Stein says, "the more specimens that are available to research, the closer our hypotheses are to the truth. This new journal provides access to research and specimens that have largely been ignored." These specimens could potentially alter many of our current hypotheses of the history of life on this planet.

The journal and its associated website are sponsored by AAPS, a group of several hundred members from around the world who deal in commercial and amateur palaeontology. The website is the end product of a two year project looking into the ethics and feasibility of tracking, documenting, and publishing on privately-held fossil specimens. The website is free of charge and open to anyone interested in fossils. It will have several sections including a specimen registry where significant fossils and their important contextual information can be recorded, tracked and viewed by researchers and enthusiasts. It will also have a photographic image registry where images of privately held fossil specimens may be downloaded. This type of registry has never been available before. The journal's new website can be found at www.aaps-journal.org

History of Geology Group and GeoConservation Commission: History of Geoconservation 24-25 November 2006 Dudley

This conference, held on the 24-25th November 2006 in the town of Dudley, in the West Midlands of the UK, was organised on behalf of Natural England, the Geoconservation Commission, HOGG (History of Geology Group) and UK RIGS. All of the local organising was done by Graham Worton and his team from the Black Country Geological Society, and the Dudley Museum.

The purpose, as I would interpret it, was to take a step back from day to day work on geoconservation for all those involved and make some assessment of where we have got to, and what have we achieved? It was a chance to look at the bigger picture of geoconservation and how some of the disparate pieces actually fitted together. The panel of speakers and the programme as a whole was very well thought out, with a good balance of different topics, interesting and stimulating speakers.

Phil Doughty, former Chairman of the Geoconservation Commission, gave a philosophical overview of the origins of geoconservation and the scientific curiosity that underpins the need, the sites and collections that engage our community. It would seem that geoconservation could have been around for over 300 years with the status of the Giant's Causeway being the subject of concern in 1693, as it still is today.

The geoconservation activities of the 19th and early 20th centuries were then assessed by Barry Thomas and Lynda Warren, who demonstrated a strong contrast between the UK and the USA. In the UK there were sites such as the Fossil Forest in Sheffield, Victoria Park in Glasgow, Hutton's Rock in Edinburgh and others that were protected or efforts were made to protect them. In most cases it was down to individuals in the UK, but in the United States of America, with federal ownership of vast tracts of land taken from the native Americans, it was possible to protect large areas as National Parks such as Yellowstone in 1872, the Devil's Tower, Wyoming (1906), and the petrified forest in Arizona (1913). The remainder of the first session on the origins of geoconservation was devoted to Tom Hose attempting a condensed history of geotourism and Murray Gray appraising the origin and evolution of geodiversity as a paradigm.

The second session addressed the more modern development of geoconservation in Britain, starting with Cynthia Burek on the vital role of volunteers. Chris Green from the Geologists' Association reported on the GA's proactive involvement in geoconservation and its role in educating geologists themselves, through codes for geological fieldwork, coring and from the financial support of the Curry Fund. The picture being compiled then moved to the governmental area, with Neil Ellis summarising the Geological Conservation

Review (1977-1990) and the more recent publication of the GCR series, documenting some 3000 sites in 100 blocks, or geological topics. Colin Prosser outlined a substantial series of milestones in both official policy and in legislation since 1949 in England. Graham Worton rounded off the session with a look at how people from different social backgrounds have made a contribution to geoconservation from their own local perspective.

In the third session an international scale appraisal was begun by Cheryl Jones who reported on the almost explosive development of Geoparks. Lars Erikstad then gave a fascinating summary of the development of geoconservation in Europe. Individual natural monuments were being protected in Germany as early as 1820, whilst Sweden and Norway began in 1909 and 1910. He emphasised the great variations from country to country, but also the important modern role of ProGEO in finding common ground. In particular he noted the importance of integrating geoconservation into nature conservation and into wider land use planning. The final talk by Patrick Boylan took a more pessimistic view of the position of geology within the 1972 World Heritage Convention, exploring how the structures and procedures are stacked against geological sites being inscribed.

The excellent day was complemented by a superb evening dinner underground in the Dudley Caverns. These are now disused limestone mines which are reached only by canal narrowboats. After dinner speeches by Patrick Boylan, Cynthia Burek and Alan Cutler took the form of historical re-enactments including Sir Roderick Murchison giving a famous oration to the crowds in the mine in the 1800's.

The second day was a field visit to Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve. This is a famous locality where an inlier of highly fossiliferous Silurian limestones in an anticline forms a long narrow hill in the midst of plains of Triassic rocks; flat plains with endless urban development, and much social deprivation. The limestone was quarried and mined and the whole area was a nucleus of the industrial revolution in Britain. We saw much practical geoconservation, in management of land use, preservation of the geological resource whilst maintaining the access and scientific availability of the sites for a population who generally have a fierce local affection for the place. The success of different efforts was best achieved when local people were directly involved in the actions taken. Hearing of the plans for major innovative reopening of the caverns which had been closed and back-filled for safety reasons was exciting and we would wish Graham Worton and his team the success they deserve with funding bids. The day was completed by lunch and tours back in the Museum.

Over 40 people attended but the Conference deserved many more as it was very well thought out, consistently interesting and thought provoking. It was, as at many such conferences, encouraging and rewarding to meet with colleagues old and new, and take strength and ideas back to continue working for geodiversity and the conservation of the best of it. The rush of people across the road during breaks indicated one success of local involvement – a Dudley Winter Ales Fayre had beers for sale named after and featuring the famous Dudley Bug (the trilobite *Calymene blumenbachii*). That really is a way to make geology popular!

Matthew Parkes, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

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'Monsters of Natural History' - GCG Seminar, AGM and fieldtrip, Plymouth 4-5 December 2006

In the waters off Plymouth in 1587 Sir Francis Drake spotted the Spanish Armada and Charles Darwin began his 5-year journey on the Beagle on the 27th December 1836. In Plymouth, John Keats published a poem in the Plymouth and Devonport weekly journal in 1838, on the beauty and immortality of the stars and Richard Owen gave a lecture in the summer of 1841, and shortly after wrote-up this presentation coining the term 'dinosaur'. Last year, another epic event happened, the Geological Curators Group 33rd AGM on December 4th 2006.

The pink and grey paving stones outside the conference venue, Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery, are evidence of a world long gone, where Plymouth sat under the sea in the Devonian period 400 million years ago. White lines snake crookedly through the slabs, proof of the immense crushing and heating undergone by the rocks. Time, the endless destroyer, has changed these rocks, and slowly time will change them again.

Look closely at the museum, and you will see similar grey rocks, but these hold evidence of past lives. Corals, distorted but surviving 400 million years of intense earth movement; close your eyes and you can feel the warm tropical ocean up to your knees, the hot sun beating down on your shoulders. Look around

and see tropical blue green sea. Move forward, only to step on something slimy, but as your weight continues, it is sharp, hard and painful, forcing you to look down. You see a *Rugose* coral, falling to the side, disturbing something as it lands on the sediment, which scurries across the sea floor. All around, below you are a plethora of fish with enigmatic shapes and colours darting past your legs, and a whole spectrum of coloured corals moving softly in the breeze of the waves above.

The GCG conference last year focused on something that might not be commonly associated with the typical image of the geology curator - something which hasn't been broached before: ***learning with geology collections*** and there was a nice attendance, including a new member all the way from Aberdeen University! It was also fantastic to see (quite) a handful of education officers from London, Plymouth and Cambridge.

After a lot of mingling, browsing the fantastic interactive Natural History Gallery and a warm welcome from the host, "Helen calm-in-the-face-of-danger Fothergill", we all got ourselves ready for the day's talks.

The morning kicked off with Barry Gamble, consultant to the new World Heritage Site Office (Cornwall and Devon) and a key person in attaining this status for the region. This fascinating talk focused on the geology and mineralogy underpinning the ten areas in the World Heritage Site. With over 40 new minerals discovered and described here for the first time, the vital history of mining and the fantastically varied geology of Devon and Cornwall, the region is an important and indeed ideal candidate for wider public access. Ironically these sites were classed as 'contaminated land' and due for hugely expensive remediation, but now they are protected and part of our international heritage. The history, both recent and ancient, will be kept alive and increase people's awareness of the local history of Devon and Cornwall.

Cally Oldershaw, whom I met at an ESTA conference back in September, was the next speaker, introducing (and reminding) us of Earth Science 'teaching and learning'. She gave a brief overview of the Earth Science Education Forum for England and Wales (ESEF(EW)), highlighting various immensely useful member groups (including the Earth Sciences Teachers Association (ESTA), of which I am a member) and resources that are available to curators and education staff. Cally also outlined the *Museum Buddy Scheme for schools* project she had been involved in. I was delighted to meet two other ESTA museum members at the conference (apparently there are only 9 museum members out of a total of 510 members across the UK!). This is such a useful and easily accessible resource for curators and education officers to use, I was surprised that there are so few museum members. Their quarterly magazine is a great way to filch new ideas about how to teach geology to school groups!

Next up was David Craven, from Bolton Museum, Art Gallery and Aquarium. His talk was about an interesting project he was involved in, taking *gifted and talented* GCSE school children on residential geology fieldtrips. 24 students were chosen from 12 schools in Bolton and then taken to the remote, beautiful and sheep-filled Anglesey. Although this sounds very much like the brutal and bloody Japanese classic, *Battle Royale*, the students were there to learn real science. This is an extraordinary project for a museum to be involved with, as the students worked with others they hadn't met before, they had to present presentations at the end of the week and look at their environment in a different way. It is a fantastic way of getting young students to look and think about their surroundings in a different way.

Sea monsters and devil's-toenails were the topic of the next talk by Tim Ewin from Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. Tim talked about several outreach events he, and myself when I was a volunteer there, had been involved with. 'Excavating Fossils' was the title of one event, where a simple mix of Plaster of Paris™, paint and sand enabled children and adults to conduct their own palaeontological dig. Their patience was rewarded by a lovely *Gryphaea* fossil eventually revealed inside the mix. This was a great way to get children and adults' hands on geology experience with explanations of how fossils form, what the fossils are and more. Other events Tim highlighted are the yearly 'Festival of Nature' and the 'Rocky Roadshow'. These have been wonderful opportunities to bring out the fabulous Westbury Pliosaur and for the public to reconstruct ancient environments and reconstruct the beast itself with fun games and activities!

Smiley, smooth talking Nick Knowles would have been interested in this next talk by Sarah Hone from the Natural History Museum, London. Sarah was in charge of making more out of the Earth Lab in the NHM, which was a space for amateur geologists to use. It was refurbished as part of the Strategic Commissioning Programme partnership with the NHM, Manchester Museum, Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the Hancock Museum, Newcastle. Earth Lab was refurbished to become a workshop for GCSE and A-Level students with learning outcomes such as: how scientists work; the rock cycle; and identifying ammonites. The new development involves interesting activities to provide students with hands on

experiences out of the classroom, and perhaps more importantly non-teacher role models too.

Next we travelled back in time to a boisterous Victorian debate between a Creationist and a Darwinian scientist. Steve McLean from the Hancock Museum, Newcastle, explained how *the Great Debate* used interactive actors and involved school groups in lively voicing of opinions and debate about the evidence for evolution. The wider project, too, proved to be an exciting way to engage the students in thinking about geology and real scientific research. Steve explained how inspiring the students using the natural history collections, encourages them to take science further. Teachers who have attended these sorts of activities said they feel more confident too, in teaching Earth Science.

All the way from Cambridge, Annette Shelford gave an interactive presentation about efforts the Sedgwick Museum are making to put geology firmly back into schools. *Ideas and Evidence* is now an element of the National Curriculum, Key Stage 3. For example, a *one-word game*, where students (and in fact conference delegates) study, think about and describe (in one word) the object they hold then pass it on to the next person, ensures they work together to produce a sort of poetry by looking at the evidence in front of them. Not only thought provoking, but great for the look of sheer panic on some delegates faces when they were told we'd try it later!

Helen King gave an informative and important talk about the role of GEES (a rather short, memorable acronym for an incredibly long title, which I always struggle to remember – The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences!). She highlighted the importance that both museums and universities can accomplish together, such as developing student volunteers, sources of expertise for identification, creating public events together (so increasing the audience), as a source of research material etc. She did point out, which was also strongly noted at the ESTA conference in September; there is a real need to persuade more students to carry on their studies in science into higher education. This is another important reason why museum curators need to promoting science by working together – with their learning departments, with local schools and with universities, to ensure there is another generation of geological curators to continue the work!

Next we all got our own hands-on experience of the different *learning* projects museums and universities were up to. Tim Ewin demonstrated his Plaster of Paris fossil dig side by side with Plymouth University who demonstrated their own method using sand and wax to create the palaeontology dig; two different ideas with exactly the same outcomes and learning objectives. Anjama Khatwa, from the Jurassic Coast Heritage, was there displaying different activities they use for groups of school children. From Plymouth, two learning officers and myself worked through some of our geology packs, containing a few rocks in each box under a separate title (*Igneous, Sedimentary, Rock Ingredients* or even *Colourful crystals* for KS1 for example). The boxes also contain activity ideas and are taken out to schools as part of our *Museum in Transit* scheme.

Other stands included Geo-ed fossils replicas, a collaborative project between Manchester University History of Science Dept. and Bolton Museum called the *Bone Trail* along with some rather tasty sedimentary rock chocolate cake. These were interesting several hands on stalls for us to try and test different methods of teaching Geology to school groups.

It was fantastic to learn about successful projects, and great to get some new ideas about getting geology more out there too. They showed how much museums are there for children and adults for teaching and passing on knowledge. There is a preconception of scientists, particularly of geologists – the old bloke with a beard wearing socks with his sandals, sitting silently in a dusty basement mulling over a few rocks, writing scientific papers and never speaking to a soul all day. These kinds of fun events and activities show how hard curators are working to put geology (and themselves) out there.

The next day was spent out and about to see some of Devon's beautiful mines and landscape; two new heritage sites, which Barry Gamble talked about on the previous day. Everyone was bright and looking fresh and raring to get out there on the sunny clear day, apart from myself and Susan Cooke who stayed up drinking beer and shots of vodka until 4 in the morning. There were others with us, but they were wise and were not booked on the field trip, so they didn't have to get up 4 hours later. The hangover hit bad as the stuffy minibus jerkily made its way to the first site, Morwellham Quay.

Arriving at the site, we were to go underground in the George and Charlotte mine. Armed with our stylish geology hard hats and a fancy torch, we set off along an old railway track which used to carry carts of rock out from the mine. On our left was steep woodland, with loose material which looked as though it was going to slump down on us at any moment. To our right an almost vertical 15m drop to the cold and uninviting River Tamar. Out there in the wilderness, 15 minutes from civilization, with danger surrounding

us, was what it was all about.

Eventually we reached the mine and entered the dark abyss. Our guide talked about the fantastic hydrothermal vents 270 million years ago and giant underground water wheel. There were eerie, life size models of men working in the mines. They changed into ghost like figures with the fading light of our torches. Normally people see this amazing leap-back-in-time-tour by luxury of a small tourist train, which runs through the length of the mine. Hard geologist that we are, we walked through the mine, with the wet, slimy and deadly sleepers and jagged rocks on the floor. Indiana Jones would have shuddered at the next challenge; a small bit of track, with a huge gaping hole below, dropping down at least 20 metres below. Unfortunately, I left my whip in the pub the night before (and what a night!). With the icy cold water dripping from above, we carefully hopped over the 2m gap to the safety of the other side. My hangover got worse.

We headed back, along the Tamar, to the little pub. After a revitalising and warm roast potato, quiet mingling and several cups of tea, we headed off to the second heritage site: Devon Great Consols mine. I was secretly disappointed not to be going to the enigmatically named 'Wheal Fanny' mine close by.

We arrived in the middle of nowhere, with beautiful surroundings and a few old run down buildings, it was the perfect setting for a horror movie. Barry led us round and talked about the old building being used to treat arsenic and copper. It was beautiful to walk around and look at these 100 year old buildings; you could easily imagine the noise of the machines, and the sound of men' laughter, as they worked so closely to this deadly element.

These site visits were a fantastic opportunity to see these beautiful old mines, which were once such a huge part of Devon. It was also fascinating to find out what they are doing to make it free, safe and accessible to everyone. It is so important to understand the importance of these mining sites and why they have become a part of World Heritage.

Throughout his life, Keats believed he was working in the shadow of greater poets. I think he would have been truly worried if he could hear these two great poems created by GCG conference 2006.

Mysterious Mica by GCG 2006

Shiny rocky sparkly dull
Jagged broken special black
Growing flaky crusty flat
Nice grey layered
Warm shiny fish-skin

Amethyst Angel by GCG 2006

Pointy prickly cold reflecting
Sharp glassy heavy tooth-like
Odourless purple magical silent
Pretty rough hexagonal blingy gem

Keats' "*Natural History of Monsters*" referred to the extinct animals placed by the French scientist Georges Buffon into his book's appendix. Not geology. Not you or I. For we are the real fun, friendly *Monsters of Natural History*, keeping it alive and not shoved in to the dark world at the back of some obscure publication. We are out, and, as this conference showed, very actively putting the *Geology* back into **FUN!**
Jan Freedman, Plymouth Museum

Forthcoming GCG seminars and workshops

Wednesday 9 May 2007, Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow.

[Note Change of Date]

1030 Coffee and welcome

1100 Kelvingrove Project - an overview: Sue Latimer, Senior Education and Access Manager
1130 Underpinning the new displays with sound research: the research manager's role: Richard
Sutcliffe, Research Manager, Natural History

1200 geological curator's role: Alastair Gunning, Curator of Geology

1230 Lunch

1330 Tour of the building and displays

1500 Tea followed by discussion

1600End of meeting

To book a place please fill out the form on page ** and return to Alastair Gunning, Curator of Geology, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Argyle St. Glasgow, G3 8AG / Telephone: 0141 276 9599, email : Alastair.Gunning@cls.glasgow.gov.uk **by 1 May 2007**

12-13 May 2008 Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London
A joint meeting between the Geoscience Information Group and the Geological Curators' Group: Exploiting geoscience collections

CALL FOR PAPERS

Geoscience collections (records, samples and digital data) are a key resource for research of all types. The compilation, management and exploitation of these resources are fundamental to a wide range of work. The conference aims to bring together the users and custodians of geoscience collections of all types to explore in detail the nature of the material being collected, how it is selected for long-term preservation, how collections are documented using metadata (collection-level descriptions), the way in which potential users can discover the information, and the ways in which this information is exploited and reused to advance science.

Contributions addressing the conference themes are welcome from both the users and custodians of geoscience collections. Case studies illustrating the successful exploitation of collections in which users and custodians worked closely together are particularly welcome. A general focus will be on exploiting collections to further knowledge of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable resource use.

Papers are sought that address the following themes: Discovery of geoscience resources; Curation for exploitation; The application of existing collections to address new issues; Building long-term bridges between distributed collections; Preparing geoscience collections for INSPIRE; Case studies on the successful exploitation of geoscience collections

Abstracts of no more than 400 words for oral presentations and subsequent published paper should be submitted to Jeremy Giles by no later than 1st October 2007. Abstracts for posters should also be sent to the same address by the same date.

Contact: Jeremy Giles, National Geoscience Data Centre, British Geological Survey, Keyworth, Nottingham NG12 5GG, tel +44 115 936 3220 email jrag@bgs.ac.uk

12 June 2007 National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff
GCG Training: Understanding and identifying Carboniferous fossil plants

This training session will be lead by Dr Chris Cleal, Head of Vegetation History Section, National Museum of Wales. The day will begin with a look at the different modes of preservation of plant fossils and what they can show us, followed by a more detailed examination of the major type of fossil plants found (lycophytes, calamites, sphenophylls, ferns, pteridosperms and cordaites) and the criteria that are used to identify them, as well as understanding diagnostic features and uses in biostratigraphical or vegetational analysis. Finally, there will be practical exercises on identifying fossil plants from the collections at NMW. The final programme and costs will be distributed by email (through the JISC Mail "GeoCurators" mail list)...so make sure you are registered to find out more.

Contact: Steve McLean, The Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PT tel 0191 222 6765 fax 0191 222 6753 email: s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

4-6 October 2007, Dorset Museums, Attractions and the Jurassic Coast (Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site)
GCG Study Visit and Field Trip

This year our plans are to visit the Dorset area to look at local museums, fossil shops and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage site. The 95 mile long site starts at Orcombe Point near Exmouth in East Devon and ends at Old Harry Rocks near Swanage in East Dorset. The site consists of Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous cliffs, spanning the Mesozoic Era, documenting 180 million years of geological history. The Jurassic coast was the first natural World Heritage Site to be designated in the United Kingdom. Not only does the area contain a number of unique geological features (Lulworth Cove, Chesil Beach etc.), but it is also famous for its historical figures such as the 19th Century Lyme Regis fossil collector Mary Anning, and as a result, museum collections reflect the richness of the palaeontology within the area.

The study visit will be over three days from Thursday 4th – Saturday 6th October 2007. So far we have plans

to visit **Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre**, Lyme Regis Museum and Dorset County Museum, as well as visits with local fossil collectors and fossil shops. There will also be the opportunity to attend a short session/debate on "fossil acquisition and the management of palaeontology sites" led by Richard Edmonds, Jurassic Coast Project Officer. Saturday will be spent on the field examining some of the spectacular geology and palaeontology of the World Heritage Site. The full programme will be published in the June edition of *Coprolite*.

Contact: Steve McLean, The Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PT tel 0191 222 6765 fax 0191 222 6753 email s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

7 November 2006 Natural History Museum, London
GCG Training: Identification, care and conservation of sub-fossil bone

Sub-fossil bones are usually found in mixed geology collections and can be some of the most difficult objects to care for. If you have a geology collection in your care, chances are there are some sub-fossil teeth, bones, tusks or antlers in your collections, and some will probably be incorrectly identified. So, take the chance to find out about them from one of the UK's leading experts on sub fossil bones, Dr Andy Currant of the NHM, and find out how to ensure that they will last in your collections for generations to come with staff from the NHM conservation labs. This is a whole day training session and places are limited so book early to avoid disappointment. Full programme will be published in the June edition of *Coprolite*.

For further details and to register interest contact: Steve McLean, The Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT tel 0191 222 6765 fax 0191 222 6753. email s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

3-4 December 2007 Natural History Museum, Dublin, Ireland
GCG Seminar and 34th AGM: Local Heroes

To commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Geological Society of London, the 150th anniversary of the Natural History Museum in Dublin and as a frontrunner event for the International Year of Planet Earth in 2008, the seminar will adopt the theme of Local Heroes which the Geological Society is promoting throughout 2007. We invite members to offer presentations, both oral and posters, on their own geological heroes. Whilst the organisers will address some Irish geological heroes, we encourage offers of contributions on any geological collectors and curators who have made a significant impact on our science. We would anticipate that the focus of any contributions will relate to collections or museums, in keeping with GCG's purpose. It is planned to include a celebratory field visit to Mount Jerome Cemetery, where many important Irish geologists were buried. All contributors will be asked to submit their paper for *Geological Curator*.

Contact: Matthew Parkes, Natural History Museum, Merrion Street, Dublin 2, Ireland. tel +353 (0)87 122 1967 email mparkes@museum.ie

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BOOKING FORM
9 May 2007
GCG Seminar and Study Visit: Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

I will be attending the seminar and study visit 9 May
I would like details of local accommodation
I enclose payment for £10 (which includes a buffet lunch in the Museum café)

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

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone.....e-mail.....

Please enclose this booking form with a cheque for £10, made payable to "Geological Curators Group" and send **by 1 May** to: Alastair Gunning, Curator of Geology, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Argyle St. Glasgow, G3 8AG

Chairman: Mandy Edwards, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, University of Manchester Manchester M13 9PL tel 0161 275 3825 fax 0161 275 3947 email mandy.edwards@man.ac.uk

Secretary: Matthew A Parkes, Natural History Division, National Museum of Ireland, Merrion Street, Dublin 2, Ireland tel +353 87 122 1967 email mparkes@museum.ie

Treasurer/Membership Secretary: John Nudds, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL. tel. 0161 275 7861 email: john.nudds@manchester.ac.uk

GCG website: <http://www.geocurator.org>