

1

1

**No. 54
November
2007**

Coprolite is compiled and produced by Tom Sharpe, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP (tel +44 (0)29 20 573265, fax +44 (0)29 20 667332, e-mail Tom.Sharpe@museumwales.ac.uk). It is published three times a year in March, June and November. Any material for inclusion should be sent to Tom Sharpe by the first of the previous month, i.e. by 1 February, 1 May or 1 October.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Please note that the 34th AGM of the Geological Curators' Group will be held at the Natural History Museum, **National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, Benburb Street, Dublin 7**, Ireland on Monday 3 December 2007 at 1530. Nominations for the posts of Chairman, Officers and one Committee Member must be made by two members of the Group and submitted in writing to Matthew A Parkes, Natural History Division, National Museum of Ireland, Merrion Street, Dublin 2, Ireland tel +353 87 122 1967 email mparkes@museum.ie **by Monday 12 November 2007**.

Brighton Medal presentation to Dr Geoffrey Tresise

At the AGM in Dublin on 3 December I will have the honour of presenting the 7th Brighton Medal to Dr Geoffrey Tresise. The Brighton Medal was inaugurated in 1992 with the aims of recognising the work of Bertie Brighton, curator of the Sedgwick Museum, Cambridge from 1931-1968, and acknowledging the importance of good curation in advancing geological science.

Geoff Tresise was Keeper of Geology at Liverpool Museum from 1960 until his retirement in 1996. He was instrumental in rebuilding the geological collections which had been extensively damaged and destroyed during the 2nd World War. Geoff was also a founder member of the Geological Curators' Group and served as secretary for 6 years during the 1980s. I am sure that many of you will know Geoff from his writing. He has written extensively about Triassic vertebrate footprints, particularly *Chirotherium*, the "Hand Beast", paying attention not only to the ichnological study of the footprints but their history and the museum collections they are stored in. His most recent paper was published in 2005.

I hope that many of Geoff's colleagues and friends can attend the meeting in Dublin
Mandy Edwards, GCG Chairman

New members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Andrew Haycock**, National Museum of Wales; **National Stone Centre**, Derbyshire.

Musical curators

Lyall Anderson has left the National Museum of Scotland and is now Newton Trust Research Fellow, working on Charles Darwin's geological samples from the *Beagle* expedition at the Sedgwick Museum in Cambridge; **John Martin**, formerly Keeper of Geology in Leicester City Museum and latterly working on the exhibitions team of Haley Sharpe Associates in Leicester, has retired.

Tiffany's baby

Members who know Tiffany Adrain, formerly of the Natural History Museum and a GCG Committee member now at the University of Iowa, will be delighted to hear that she and her husband Jonathan have had a baby boy, James Conor, born on 5 June.

Back issues of *Geological Curator*—a final call

This is your last chance to fill those gaps in your run of *The Geological Curator* and its predecessor, *GCG Newsletter*. If you would like any free back issues, contact Mandy Edwards at Manchester before Christmas.

Newish publications

- Scotland's beginnings* by Michael A Taylor and Andrew Kitchener, 2007. Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 96pp. ISBN 978 1 901663 26 6, £8.99.
- Silurian fossils of the Pentland Hills, Scotland* edited by Euan N K Clarkson, David A T Harper, Cecilia M Taylor and Lyall I Anderson, 2007. Palaeontological Association Field Guides to Fossils: Number 11, 218pp. ISBN 978 1 405 17715 3, £15.00
- Icons, classics and contemporary masterpieces of mineralogy* by Wayne A Thompson, 2007. Tucson: The Mineralogical Record, 192pp. \$35.00.
- 'Strata' Smith: his two hundred year legacy. Digitally enhanced maps and sections by William Smith, George Bellas Greenough, John Cary and Richard Thomas (1796-1840)* by Peter Wigley, Peter Dolan, Tom Sharpe and Hugh S Torrens, 2007. London: Geological Society. DVD. ISBN 978 1 86239 244 1, £23.50.
- Four centuries of geological travel* edited by Patrick N Wyse Jackson, 2007. London: Geological Society Special Publication 287, 424pp. ISBN 978 1 86239 234 2, £90.00.
- The role of women in the history of geology* edited by C V Burek and B Higgs, 2007. London: Geological Society Special Publication 281, 352pp. ISBN 978 1 86239 227 4, £85.00.

Fossil, mineral and gem shows 2007

10-11 November Cheltenham Racecourse, Prestbury Park, Cheltenham

24-25 November Brighton Racecourse, Freshfield Road, Brighton

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

The Natural History Museum, Dublin

As some members may have heard, there was an unfortunate at the Natural History Museum in Dublin in early July this year. A staircase in the staff area collapsed with a fall, whilst they were attending a training course in the Museum. There were a number of injuries but fortunately no one was hurt. The Museum has been closed to the public since and has had very limited access to offices, collections and library. The safety considerations and implications for the future are due to the Museum late 2008 in any event. These are the restoration of this classic Victorian building (*Geological Curator* 5: 275-282), the addition of a modern extension (including a lift, education spaces, temporary exhibition space, cafe and shop) and renovation of the roof. This would have closed the Museum for an extended period whilst all collections would have been removed. Natural History staff are hoping that plans to include an earth science gallery will go ahead once they are clarified. Sadly the incident also meant that the anniversary this year has been postponed, however it will be issued on 25 October featuring a giant deer *Megaloceros giganteus* from the Irish Pleistocene (see irishstamps.ie for details).

Matthew Parkes

Geology curator in training

It was suggested to me that, with gentle persuasion and under the guise of "It may be nice if ...," I write something for the GCG newsletter, having recently become a member due to my current employment. The aim being with this anecdote, to enlighten fellow geologists as to what my current employment entails and how useful I may be in the future!

The memorable job title I hold is Supporting Stewardship Trainee and I have been based at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery since March 2007. The post is a West Midlands project, funded jointly through Renaissance WM and the MLA_WM for two years. It is designed to bring more geological expertise into the area, with the view of benefiting museums not under the 'hub' umbrella and who do not have a resident geological curator.

Being new to the world of museums, but not to geology, I have everything to learn and the first few months at the host venue have been eventful and enjoyable. This new learning curve means getting to grips with documentation, computerised records, reorganising education handling material and, most importantly, actually familiarising myself with the geology collection. During my initial few months, I have been assisted by members of a subject specialist steering group; Don Steward as mentor at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Graham Worton (Dudley Museum & Art Gallery), Jon Radley (Warwickshire Museum), Daniel Lockett (Ludlow Library & Museum Resource Centre), Jon Clatworthy (Lapworth Museum of Geology) and Kate Andrew (Herefordshire Heritage Service), who are adding their expertise and knowledge to my skills base.

In addition to working with geology collections in the West Midlands, I shall be studying for an MA in Heritage Management at the Ironbridge Institute which will take up most of my time from October 2007. I will then be available to assist personally, and to a small degree financially, with the curation of selected orphaned geological collections in the West Midlands.

If you require any further information about the post, please contact me, Vicky Tunstall at The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Bethesda Street, Cultural Quarter, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3DW tel 01782 232323

On-line resource for archives

I have recently come across a fantastic free on-line resource for archives which is open to universities and museums who have researchers use their collection: www.archiveshub.ac.uk. It is relatively simple to submit details of archives which are then available for anyone to search. The people that run it are all incredibly helpful and offer training sessions, which I found very useful. They are really keen to spread the word and get as many archives on as possible. I am in the process of putting details of Manchester's Boyd Dawkins archive on their database which should be available in the autumn.

David Gelsthorpe, Manchester Museum

Canterbury Museum's 10th Fossil Roadshow

'**Earthquake!**' is the theme of Canterbury Museum's tenth Fossil Roadshow. Prompted by the Folkestone earthquake of 28 April 2007, the Roadshow will recall this and other natural shocks to the local area over the years. Our team of experts will be on hand to identify all manner of geological material brought in by the public, and they expect to be busy throughout the event, which attracts up to 1000 visitors, many of them children. Enthusiasts from local fossil groups, including the Oyster Coast Fossil Society, Medway Fossil and Mineral Society, the Sheppey Fossil Study Group, Kent Regionally Important Geological Sites Group, Kent Geologists' Group and the Ravensbourne Geological Society, will be exhibiting their latest and most spectacular finds.

Activities and demonstrations for children (and adults!) will include panning for gold, discovering 'hollow' fossils, and trying your hand at finding fossil sharks' teeth. Micro-fossils can be viewed through a microscope and a 'touch table' will allow visitors to handle real fossils, including ammonites, dinosaur bones and a mammoth's tooth. The Roadshow takes place on Saturday 16 February 2008 at the Royal Museum, High Street, Canterbury, Kent from 10.00-13.00 and 14.00-16.00. Admission is free.

For further details contact Ralph Anderson or Martin Crowther on 01227 452747.

GCG Seminar: Identifying Coal Measures Plant Fossils training National Museum of Wales, Cardiff 12 June 2007

In June, Chris Cleal ran a workshop at the National Museum Wales on identifying Coal Measures plants. About 15 of us turned up from various museums and geological sites, all keen to brush up on our identification skills. After coffee, Chris began the day by going through environments and habitats, types of plants and diagnostic features and some biostratigraphy. He had put together a fantastic handout covering the essentials of this vast subject. As we discovered on the day, one of the most useful things is knowing where to start and where to look for further information.

At lunch we had a chance to have a good look round the displays (we almost didn't need the labels for the plants) and then met up for a tour of the stores with Cindy Howells. Cindy showed us the collection and we had a discussion about sites, collecting and storage. Then came our opportunity to test our new found knowledge... the identification exercise. With copies of Chris Cleal and Barry Thomas' *Plant Fossils of the British Coal Measures* in hand, we passed round the fossils. It is fair to say that we all found it really hard, but at least we now knew where to start narrowing down the options. I'm sure everyone who attended would like to extend their thanks to Chris Cleal for such a useful day. We all went home with renewed confidence in dealing with these important and relatively numerous collections.

David Gelsthorpe, Manchester Museum

SPNHC Conference St Paul, Minnesota May 2007

Around 160 people attended this years conference for the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections where the theme was 'Build it and they will come' and was based at both the Minnesota History

Center and the Minnesota Science Museum.

The plenary lecture was by Michael Mares about the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Oklahoma that took over a hundred years of planning. On numerous occasions, just days before the funds were promised, some disaster happened including the donor dying just before signing the cheque, the Great Crash of 1929 just before funds were released, and several fires. Finally in 2000 the museum succeeded in obtaining funds from the Noble family, the museum was built and will be the host for next years SPNHC.

One of the most intriguing talks was from Patrick Kociolek about the new California Academy of Sciences building which should be completed next year. (See <http://www.calacademy.org/newacademy/> for details) In an effort to be more sustainable the structure will have a grass roof, and windows that open rather than a sealed air conditioned building. The speaker was very convincing, however, later rumours were circulating that with no environmental control the curators don't think they will be able to put any collections on display when it is complete - so wait and see !

There were many other speakers, on similar topics of new museums, stores, and moving collections plus a few miscellaneous themes. A full list of presentations and abstracts can be found from the societies web site at <http://www.spnhc.org/about/index.html> At one point I ended up at a talk on how to get all of your U.S. permits for collecting and importing plants and animals, but due to concurrent sessions I had to miss the demonstration on how to move a dinosaur.

There was a discussion session on off-site storage with representatives from the NHM, Smithsonian, and the Canadian Museum of Nature. Though many staff had initially negative ideas about moving off-site the consensus was that though the sites were not without problems (e.g. security, accessing the site), they were somewhere people could work in piece, in more pleasant out of town surroundings, and contained more modern facilities.

Andrejs Cers from Durant Group inc. gave an amusing talk at the workshop about not letting architects take control. Apparently museums are very popular targets for architects as they have the potential to win lots of prizes for the design but can leave the staff with an unworkable finished product. One example given was of a submarine shaped art gallery where the resulting walls were curved in every direction. Even at the Minnesota History Center where they had strong control the architect managed to get some of his favourite oak doors in and a hanging ceiling in some of the office areas, despite being instructed to the contrary as it slipped through on the drawings.

The workshop, on the building theme, was given by the staff and contractors involved in building the Minnesota History Center and the Science Museum of Minnesota and focused how to check plans and blueprints; to be specific in what you ask for; and make sure that your concerns are dealt with. Of particular note were practices such as writing all of the problems down in an official notebook so that you could prove that they had been noted, having a voluntary staff meeting on the new site every Friday afternoon to check progress, and the use of several independent contractors, such as a project manager who checked that all of the correct documents and parts were supplied. Also useful in these cases was a buildings commissioner who made sure the building worked and that the new staff were trained and provided with a building manual. There was a lot of detail on the popular USA system of heating, ventilating and air conditioning known as HVAC and after the talks we toured the plant rooms at both museums to see the HVAC systems and the general layouts. Though there was the odd light switch out of place and a few lights of the wrong style both museums had been well planned with large loading bays, isolation areas and freight lifts and the projects had been built to specification .

The storage area at the Science Museum was a single row of compacter racking for all of the disciplines (apart from the fluid collection which was next door) ranging from anthropology to palaeontology. This provided more room than putting in walls to divide up the disciplines and there had been no problems with sharing the space so far though there did seem to be a few more palaeontology specimens hanging around on trolleys than the other disciplines! Most of the rooms had no false ceilings so that there was no chance of animals or leaks accumulating. The small mineral collection was in the type room to which we were not allowed access.

The field trip involved tracing the St Anthony falls up the Mississippi river from St Paul to its present location. The river valley in St Paul is very wide and would have originally provided a waterfall the size of Niagara however the soft local sandstone meant that the falls moved backwards at a rapid rate all the way up to Minneapolis. The falls moved 200ft in the last 100 years before being stabilized (i.e. concreted!) . The University has its fluid labs on the side of the falls providing naturally flowing water for all of their

experiments. We also visited one of the minor falls on the Minnesota: the Minnehaha falls of Hiawatha fame (also fairly stabilized).

The hotel in downtown St Paul was on the bus route from the airport (\$1.50), and the two host museums were just minutes away. There were also many pubs, cafes and restaurants, and microbreweries all within easy walking distance making it a great place to hold a conference.

Helen Kerbey

Forthcoming GCG seminars and workshops

Check our website www.geocurator.org for updates to our seminar programme

7 November 2007 Natural History Museum, London

GCG Training: Identification, Care and Conservation of Sub Fossil Bones

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 Carrant, Curator of Fossil Mammals at NHM, and find out how to ensure that they will last in your collections for generations to come with Chris Collins, Head of Conservation in the NHM Department of Palaeontology. This is a whole day training session and places are limited so book early to avoid disappointment.

Programme

- 0930 Arrive and Coffee
- 0955 Welcome
- 1000 Overview of British Late Pleistocene fossils and localities, including offshore and inland.
- 1100 Identifying late Pleistocene fossils – practical exercises
- 1230 Lunch and viewing of stored collections
- 1400 Conserving sub-fossil bones – common problems and practical solutions – preventative and interventive techniques.
- 1530 Coffee/Tea
- 1545 Sub-fossil bones and research – sampling techniques and the impact of conservation procedures.
- 1615 Conclusions and discussion
- 1630 End

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 National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, Benburb Street, Dublin 7, Ireland

GCG Seminar and 34th AGM: *Local Heroes*

To commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Geological Society, 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 theme is ***Local Heroes*** that the Geological Society is promoting throughout 2007. All contributors will be asked to submit their paper for *Geological Curator*. Contact for further information: Matthew Parkes, Natural History Museum, Merrion Street, Dublin 2, Ireland. +353 87 122 1967 or email: mparkes@museum.ie

Outline Programme

Monday 3 December

(1) Local Heroes Papers

The following papers (in no particular order) are almost all confirmed but there may be late changes. There may be space for one or two late offers, and for posters. Please contact Matthew Parkes.

Lyall Anderson and Michael Taylor: Charles W. Peach, Palaeobotany and Scotland

Ros Westwood: Prof. Sir William Boyd Dawkins (1837 - 1928), author of *Cave Hunting* (1874), and his student, Dr.J.W.Jackson (1880 - 1978)

Patrick Wyse Jackson and Matthew Parkes: William Hellier Baily – forever an Acting Palaeontologist

Nigel Monaghan: Leopold McClintock – Arctic Fox

Michael Taylor and Lyall Anderson: The museology of a local, national *and* supranational hero: Hugh Miller's collections over the decades

Mike Howe: Darwin @ the Survey

Christine Thomson and Louise Neep: Robert Kidston: gentleman geologist
Patrick Wyse Jackson: John Joly – the sailing geologist
Dave Gelsthorpe: Marie Stopes the Palaeobotanist, Manchester, Scott of the Antarctic and her adventures in Japan
Jean Archer: The three geologists – the public and private faces of Griffith's great geological map of Ireland
Matthew Parkes: J.C. Coleman – the Father of Irish Caving

(2) **Award of the Brighton Medal**

(3) **15.30 GCG 34th AGM**

(4) **Special lecture.** Following the AGM, **Professor Gordon Herries Davies will give an invited Special Lecture on the history of the Geological Society of London**, on its 200th Anniversary. The Geological Curators' Group is affiliated to the Geological Society.

(5) **GCG Seminar Dinner** at a Dublin venue to be confirmed

Tuesday 4 December

Morning: Visit to Mount Jerome Cemetery, where numerous Irish geologists are buried

Lunch: by courtesy of Patrick Wyse Jackson at his home

Afternoon: optional visits to:

geological collections in Dublin (TCD and Natural History Museum)

tour of building stones and geologist homes in Dublin led by Patrick Wyse Jackson

field visit to classic localities in north Dublin close to Dublin Airport for those with evening flights.

CHECK www.geocurator.org for updates to this programme

April 2008 University of Manchester

GCG Workshop: Archives

Contact: David Gelsthorpe, Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

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

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 1 December 2007. Abstracts for posters should also be sent to the same address by the same date.

Convenors: Garry Baker, Jeremy Giles, Mike Howe and Leilani Smith

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

Autumn 2008

GCG Workshop: Microclimates and storage techniques

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

October 2008 Portugal

We hope to participate in a collections conference being organised in Portugal and to combine this with our annual study visit. Watch out for further details.

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

1-2 December 2008 University of Portsmouth

GCG Seminar and 35th AGM: New ways of looking at old fossils

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

Other meetings

9-13 November 2007, Isle of Wight and London

History of Geology Group: Bicentennial conference, field trip and dinner

9-11 November 2007 Walk with the Founding Fathers: fieldtrip

In an area of outstanding importance for the foundations of our science, this excursion will enable participants to understand the practical difficulties that our forefathers experienced 200 years ago as they tried to make sense of what they saw in the field. It will focus on Thomas Webster, the Geological Society's first salaried officer, whose well-patronised fieldwork on the Isle of Wight in 1811-13, and major paper published by the Society in 1814, first unravelling its stratigraphy and tectonics, interpreted its fossils in palaeoecological terms, and thereby extended to an international level the earlier research of Cuvier and Brongniart on the Paris Basin. The trip will also briefly cover the work of the next generation of geologists, such as Charles Lyell and Gideon Mantell, which included the interpretation of what were later called dinosaurs.

Field Leaders: Professors Martin Rudwick and Hugh Torrens, both of whom have wide knowledge of the contribution made by early nineteenth century workers to the history of British geology.

12-13 November 2007 Talk with the Founding Fathers: conference

The conference will focus on the achievements of the Society, the founders, and some of its members and their activities over the past 200 years. It will cover three themes: the status of geology in comparison to other sciences in the UK and to geology in other countries around 1807; the foundation and founders of the Society; and the first 100 years.

12 November 2007 Dine with the Founding Fathers

A dinner will be held in the Connaught Rooms, which now incorporates the Freemasons' Tavern where the Geological Society was founded. A plaque commemorating the founding of the Society will be unveiled.

For further details **contact:** Cherry Lewis, email cherry.lewis@bristol.ac.uk

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: 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>