



# OPROLITE

**No. 69  
March  
2013**

---

DROPPINGS  
FROM THE  
GEOLOGICAL  
CURATORS  
GROUP

*Coprolite* is compiled and produced by Helen Kerbey, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP (e-mail Helen.Kerbey@museumwales.ac.uk, tel +44 (0)29 20 573367). It is published three times a year in March, June and November. Any material for inclusion should be sent to Helen Kerbey by the first of the previous month, i.e. by 1 February, 1 May or 1 October.

**Chairman:** Mike Howe, British Geological Survey, Kingsley Dunham Centre, Keyworth, Nottingham NG12 5GG Tel: 0115 9363105 Fax: 0115 936 3200 Email mhowe@bgs.ac.uk

**Secretary:** Helen Kerbey, Research Assistant-Laboratory Services, National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff F64 4DL Tel 02920 573367 Email helen.kerbey@museumwales.ac.uk

**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>

## **2013 subscriptions**

Subscriptions are now due for 2013, but in order to reduce postage costs I'll only be sending invoices out to those haven't paid by the end of March. The standard personal membership rate is £15 (UK) or £18 (Non-UK) or there is an optional concessionary rate of £10. Please send cheques to Cindy Howells, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, CF10 3NP. If you have a Standing Order please check that you are paying the correct rate, as there are still some on the old rate. These people will be invoiced for the difference each year, but it would save the group a lot of time and money if they were to change their SO payment with their bank as soon as possible. Remember it is your responsibility to change your SO payment. It is also your responsibility to ensure that our contact records are kept up to date. If you change your email address, move job or house, or wish your journals to be sent elsewhere, then please let me know.

**Cindy Howells** [cindy.howells@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:cindy.howells@museumwales.ac.uk)

## **New members**

**Sherene James-Williamson** - University of the West Indies Geology Museum;  
**Holly Siewwright** - Assistant Collections Officer, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke on Trent; **Frank Osbæk** - Museernes Bevaringscenter I Skive, Denmark; **John Kington** - Climatic Research Unit, School of Env Science, University of East Anglia.

## **Phil Doughty**

Members will be saddened to hear of the death of Philip Doughty. Philip had been ill for some months and he died suddenly on Monday morning 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Philip, who was the first geologist on the staff of the Ulster Museum, was appointed Assistant Keeper in 1965, made Keeper of Geology c. 1970, retired 2002. He was a founder member of GCG (in 1974), wrote *State and Status of Geology in U.K. Museums* and was awarded the Brighton Medal in 2010. He was a long serving and prominent member of GCG. Philip's wife died in 1990 and he is survived by two sons and a daughter.

**Ken James**, Curator (Geology), Ulster Museum.

## **Musical Curators**

**Sarah King** has taken up a job as Natural Science Collections Facilitator at York Museum; **John Cooper** has returned to the Booth Museum in Brighton as Keeper (Natural Sciences); **Andy Currant** has retired from his job in the fossil vertebrates section at the Natural History Museum, London; **Kate Andrew** is now Project manager at Hereford & Worcester Earth Heritage Trust.

## **Committee News.**

Following the 2012 AGM and the adoption of the new constitution (See Coprolite 68) the Committee is as follows:

**Chairman:** Mike Howe

**Secretary:** Helen Kerbey

**Treasurer:** John Nudds

**Membership Secretary:** Cindy Howells

**Programme Secretary:** Jim Spenser

**Editor of the Journal :** Matthew Parkes

**Editor of the Newsletter :** Helen Kerbey

**Minutes Secretary:** Tony Morgan

**Web Officer:** Hannah-Lee Chalk

**Collections Officer:** Mike Howe

**Committee Members:** Emma Bernard, Giles Miller, Steve Mclean

**Co-opted members:**

**Constitution:** Tom Sharpe

**NatSca rep:** Kathryn Riddington

**Icon rep:** vacant

## Fossil, mineral and gem shows 2013

- 23-24 Mar** Brighton Racecourse. Rock & Gem Show  
**13-14 April** Newton Abbot Racecourse. Rock & Gem Show  
**20-21 April** Newark Showground. Rock & Gem Show  
**11-12 May** Newmarket Racecourse. Rock & Gem Show  
**12 May** Exeter Hall, Kidlington, Oxford. Oxford Mineral Fossil Show  
[www.oxfordshow.co.uk/](http://www.oxfordshow.co.uk/)  
**8-9 June** Kempton Park Racecourse. Rock & Gem Show

For further information on Rock & Gem shows contact Rock and Gem Ltd, PO Box 72, Maidenhead SL6 7GB tel 01628 621697 email [info@rockngem.co.uk](mailto:info@rockngem.co.uk)  
[www.rockngem.co.uk](http://www.rockngem.co.uk)

## Requests for information and help

### Do you have Antarctic rocks?

Do you have any rocks from Antarctica in your collections? Tom Sharpe is interested in locating material collected during the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration a century ago (c.1898-1922), specifically specimens from Ernest Shackleton's 1907-09 *Nimrod* Expedition and Captain Robert Falcon Scott's 1910-13 British Antarctic (*Terra Nova*) Expedition. The bulk of these collections resides in the Natural History Museum in London, but according to the Geology Reports of Scott's expedition, duplicate material was given to "the Geological or Mineralogical Departments of many Universities".

With the closure of many of these departments in the Earth Sciences Review of the early 1990s, much may have gone astray, but it is hoped that some may have found its way into museum collections.

Tom is keen to hear of any Antarctic material in museum collections as it may be that the association with a particular expedition has been lost.

If you can help, please contact Tom at [tom.sharpe@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:tom.sharpe@museumwales.ac.uk) or at the Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP, tel 029 2057 3265

### Linking Natural Science Collections

A new project will build on the distributed national collection programme described in the Welsh Museums Strategy and establish a network of natural science collections across Wales.

The Linking Natural Science Collections project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, started in January 2013. The aims of the project are to make these collections more accessible through a range of opportunities for audiences to engage with and explore these collections. The project is currently scheduled to run for three years. It is a partnership between Cymal, the National Museum, and

the Federation of Welsh Museums and it is hoped that the project will lead to a better public understanding of natural science collections, which are currently under threat.

The initial stages, an audit of natural science objects and collections will be undertaken across Welsh museums, followed by the development of an online database of natural science collections and a touring exhibition. In addition, training will be provided for curators to enable them to use their collections beyond the project, leaving a sustainable legacy. This project aims to highlight the loss of natural history expertise from the Welsh museum sector, as the only museum in Wales with specialist expertise is now NMW

One of the initial challenges is to identify the collections that we can concentrate our efforts on; there are at least 102 collections containing natural history objects in Wales, and this project will not be able to cover all of them, even at current staffing levels. I am therefore asking for your combined knowledge of various collections around the country to allow us to prioritise collections. Which collections are especially important? **Do you know of any Welsh institutions housing particularly important individual specimens?**

For more details about this project please get in touch with **Christian Baars** christian.baars@museumwales.ac.uk (tel 029 2057 3113).

## Meeting reports

### **GCG seminar 4/5<sup>th</sup> December 2012 (part 1)**

In early December 2012, 18 delegates convened at the New Walk Museum, Leicester, to attend the GCG seminar and AGM. The theme of the meeting was 'Discovering Lost Worlds: New Displays and Visualisations', with the main focus of talks being on exhibitions and interpretation. Recent renewals to the geology galleries at New Walk Museum provided a topical setting for the meeting, as well as the basis for several of the presentations. After a warm welcome from Mike Howe (BGS) the seminar got underway. One recurring theme of the seminar emphasised the wide variety of perspectives and collaborators required to make any exhibition a success; another highlighted the growing role that digital technology has to play, not only in scientific research, but also in museum displays.

Proceedings were kicked off by meeting organiser Mark Evans (Leicester Arts and Museum Service), together with Cassandra Killington, who provided an overview of the new geology galleries at the New Walk Museum. The centrepiece of the new displays is the Rutland dinosaur, a giant mounted *Cetiosaurus* skeleton. Along with the rest of the exhibits, this was dismantled as part of the renewals, and the entire gallery was redesigned from scratch. The end result is an impressive achievement, as we were able to experience for ourselves later in the day. The new gallery was opened to great acclaim in September 2011 by Sir David Attenborough.

Professional palaeoartist Bob Nicholls (Paleocreations) was next to explain his involvement in the new galleries at Leicester. His presentation on 'palaeoart for museums – from the artist's perspective', outlined the intricate process he goes through to reconstruct prehistoric creatures "from the inside out". Nicholls produced a variety of restorations especially for the New Walk Museum and he presented some of these as case studies. The process can be regarded as a marriage between science and art, as fine-tuning of the anatomy and composition takes each work through multiple incarnations. In addition to traditional illustration and sculpture, Nicholls' also showed how the digital revolution is playing a part in his work: digital painting and sculpting software is now a common tool in many artists' arsenal.

David Siveter (University of Leicester) next turned our attention to some actual fossils, or rather, digital 3D versions of them. The Silurian Herefordshire Lagerstätte is especially important, not only because of the fine preservation of the fossils contained within its nodules, but also because the strata occupy a stratigraphic gap in the fossil record of soft-bodied organisms. The only problem, how to get these scientifically valuable fossils out of the nodules? Exhausting all other options, Siveter has developed a technique using physical tomography to reveal the spectacular specimens in all their bristly and spiny glory. We were even treated to a sneak preview of some new specimens currently in press.

Lunchtime gave us the opportunity to explore the new geology galleries in the New Walk Museum. Some familiar specimens, such as the massive Rutland dinosaur skeleton, and the Barrow Kipper plesiosaur, still take centre stage as they have done for many years, but there's plenty of new material on display now too. I was especially taken with the Jurassic marine reptiles, and Bob Nicholls' scale models and illustrations are even more wonderful in real life. Throughout the galleries, simple wire frames (produced by JRR engineering) fill in the missing parts of fossil animals; an ingenious and highly effective method of interpretation. In addition to the collections on display, we were also able to admire the various forms of Jurassic life that casually swam by, or overhead, as part of an immersive virtual reality display. The design and installation of this digital environment was the topic of the next talk.

Graham Patten and Scot Jones (Maelstrom) were responsible for the installation of an immersive virtual reality display in the New Walk Museum that depicts a teeming Oxford Clay ocean. Maelstrom collaborated with Bob Nicholls and Mark Evans to ensure accuracy and consistency of the fauna across the gallery. 3D scanners were used to import real world models into a digital environment, where they were brought to life. The technology employed is mainly used for marketing and training, but the potential for use as a tool for interpretation in museums, as demonstrated by the New Walk Museum exhibit, is particularly exciting.

Back firmly in the real world, John Martin (Haley Sharpe Design) took us on a journey through the compromising process of interpretative design for museums. The basic principle is that of design for communication. In particular, Martin

investigated the importance of thorough planning and the value of identifying interpretative objectives and targeting audiences.

To finish up proceedings, Dave Unwin (University of Leicester) looked back at his involvement in the refurbished dinosaur galleries at the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, which opened to the public in 2007. After providing an historical overview of the museum and the African origins of its dinosaur collections, Unwin ensured that Leicester's Rutland *Cetiosaurus* wasn't the only giant sauropod skeleton to receive attention this meeting. The Berlin *Brachiosaurus* (or *Giraffatitan* as it is now properly known, whether we like it or not) isn't the tail-dragging slouch it used to be. Today, it strides majestically through the main hall. At 13m it is the tallest mounted dinosaur in the world, so remounting it presented logistic challenges. Unwin underlined the importance of getting in the professionals for jobs like these. On the other end of the scale, the Berlin specimen of *Archaeopteryx* is now on display for the first time.

The seminar was enjoyable, insightful, and provided a little something for everyone. On behalf of the group, I'd like to thank Mark Evans and the other organisers for providing a stimulating series of talks and a perfect venue for the meeting.

**Adam Smith, Nottingham Natural History Museum**

### **GCG seminar 4/5<sup>th</sup> December 2012 (part 2)**

Following on from a most enjoyable seminar, the AGM was also held in the museum. However, business was quickly dispensed with and delegates were free to amuse themselves for the evening. The freezing weather put off most from venturing out, so it was a small but select group that gathered in a local hostelry to sample the fayre. On finding that it was pub quiz night, we entered a team and although we didn't win (the prize was only lager!), we did beat the geology students on the next table!

Next morning was bright and frosty as we drove up to BGS Keyworth, where we were welcomed by Mike Howe before wrapping up well to head outside to view the new Geological Walk. This was opened in May 2012 as part of a major redevelopment of the whole site. The walk is designed to celebrate the diverse geology of the whole of Britain and Northern Ireland through a series of impressively large rock specimens and natural stone paving and I suggest that one acquires a copy of the accompanying leaflet from the BGS main entrance in order to get the most from this experience. We were shown round it by Steve Parry of the BGS, who explained that the approach to the Reception building is marked with five large boulders representing England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as covering sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rock types.

Round the side of the building, past the statue of Hercules (now restored to his original glory!), we entered the main part of the 130m geological walk. There are 39 different areas of rock slabs, 15 monoliths and several rock benches, all representing the entire geological column in a most attractive fashion. Overlooking

the walk is the James Hutton Building, and the wall of this cleverly represents Hutton's angular unconformity at Siccar Point, with vertically arranged Silurian grey sandstone tiles meeting horizontal layers of Upper Devonian red sandstone. It's a fascinating exhibit and I hope it lasts the test of time. One or two of the rocks were showing signs of weathering, so it was lovely to see it whilst still so fresh. As most of the group were complaining of frostbite by the time we reached the end, we headed back indoors for a lunch in the canteen, before a somewhat warmer afternoon learning about the JISC GB3D fossils online project and seeing a demonstration of the technique. Although I had to leave at this point, the afternoon was scheduled to finish with a tour of the collections, which I was sorry to miss.

It was a lovely opportunity to visit the new BGS redevelopment at Keyworth and thanks go to Mike Howe for arranging a great day.

**Cindy Howells, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales**

### **Comment and discussion**

#### **HS2 – an opportunity for a collections renaissance?**

Cuttings totalling 133.9km and new tunnels are a significant feature of the proposed routes of HS2 phase 2 (*New Civil Engineer* 31.01.13). On top of this, Phase 1 sees more than 70km of cuttings and tunnels (<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/developing-a-new-high-speed-rail-network>).

Been here before? In Victorian times the science of geology was a significant beneficiary of the growth of railway networks, and museum collections benefited from the tremendous opportunities afforded by these developments. Two examples serve to illustrate this:

Firstly, in the late 1840s trial shafts and then the excavation of the Bincombe Tunnel and cutting for the railway between Dorchester and Weymouth, Dorset, revealed the complexities of the Ridgeway Fault, helping then, and now (see link in final paragraph) to illuminate the *tectonics of South Dorset* [which] *are unique in the South of England, for their variety, intensity, complexity and interest.* (Arkell, W.J., 1947, *Geology of the country around Weymouth, Swanage, Corfe and Lulworth, Mem.Geol.Surv.G.B.*)

Secondly, *the Christian Malford Lagerstätte* [which] *lies within the Peterborough Member of the Oxford Clay Formation (Callovian, Middle Jurassic). It was discovered early in the 1840s during the construction of the Great Western Railway and was still being collected up until 1854. Contemporary accounts of the exposure are poor and the distribution of fossils at outcrop is unknown .....* , (Wilby, P.R, Duff, K., Page, K. and Martin, S., 2008, *Geology Today*, 24, pp.95-98, ([http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/3836/1/Wilby\\_et\\_al.pdf](http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/3836/1/Wilby_et_al.pdf)).

As this latter brief extract demonstrates, while important collections were developed, the records made at the time were sometimes poor – and of course

were based on the wisdom of the day. Immense strides have been made in our understandings of earth processes, stratigraphy, and the fossil record etc. Our approach to the geology we see is with new eyes; HS2 provides another bite at the cherry – albeit a rather smaller one!

If not already in-hand, surely now is the time to identify those parts of the routes which could shed new light on old collections and geological problems. Attempting to monitor all this 'new' geology both in the geotechnical phase, and then during the build will be challenging – but what an opportunity! Yes staffing levels in these financially constrained times are being challenged; there may be a strong presumption against collecting ('document what you have' - but see Christian Malford example above) in some institutions, and storage may be a problem – but what will future generations of earth scientists say if this opportunity should pass unchallenged from when the first 'spades' are scheduled to hit the ground in 2017 – and earlier for the geotechnical investigations.

Access issues are always difficult, but as recent collaboration between contractors and geologists on the Dorchester - Weymouth Relief Road has shown, it is not impossible to come to an accommodation (Ensom, P.C. 2010, *The Weymouth Relief Road*, in Geological Report, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society*, 131, p.171; Dr Ian West's web site <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~imw/Ridgeway-Railway-Cutting.htm>). Should hard-pressed curators try and engage with those leading these massive engineering projects, seeking practical – and perhaps even financial – assistance? I am quite sure that the archaeologists will be out there . . . . and I am equally sure that geologists, including those from local museums, should be out there as well!  
**Paul Ensom, Falmouth, Cornwall. 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

### **The Campaign for Good Curatorship**

Ever thought that curators get a bad rap in museums these days? Ever been frustrated that museum colleagues do not really understand why what you do is important? Then the **Campaign for Good Curatorship** is for you! This Campaign is run by Dr Tim Ewin and the Collections Trust, so please see our manifesto below.

The campaign is looking to champion curators in general and is not specific to any one subject, discipline or collection. The campaign is about trying to create a more balanced museum service for society, which values contributions from different parts of the sector rather than arguing "what is more important". This is because we believe that for all museums to be effective they need a range of personnel and skills including curators and curatorial knowledge.

#### **MANIFESTO: The Good Curatorship Campaign**

Museums have a vital role to play in a healthy, tolerant and inclusive society. We believe that all museums need good curators and that maximising public benefit comes from a balance between community engagement and expertise in the objects pertaining to that community's heritage.



Good curators understand their collections and use this knowledge to improve the impact, value and sustainability of all of the outward-facing functions of the museum. We are inspired by the vision of museums as open, participatory places. Our aim is to promote the crucial role of curators and curatorship in making museums and their collections useful, relevant and sustainable for the public benefit.

We are deeply concerned by the decrease in support of and provision for curatorial expertise in the museums sector. We believe that action needs to be taken now so that knowledge of objects and their relevance to the communities with whom the museums engage is not lost. Action is needed now as many museum employees with this knowledge are nearing retirement, and there is no adequate provision of continuity of this expertise.

Only through promoting and connecting the different sets of professional skills, from curatorship, outreach, education, collections management, marketing and leadership will we achieve this vision.

What is a Good Curator?

A good curator is defined here as one who is:

- A specialist who is knowledgeable about the collections and their context to the communities they serve.
- Able to recognise the value of their collection and ensure it continues to develop to remain relevant
- Able to make their knowledge freely available to support the work of their colleagues and the wider functions of the museum, particularly with regards to ensuring sustainable use of collections and that this knowledge is continued in perpetuity
- Accountable, open and honest and committed to diversity and inclusivity.

What is Good Curatorship?

The Good Curatorship Campaign seeks to make provision for appropriate levels of curatorial staff a priority within the museum sector, and thereby support the following outcomes for museums:

- Ensure the collections are relevant to the communities they serve;
- Produce more effective exhibitions & outreach that enhance the visitor's understanding (not just divert their attention);
- Provide more efficient collections management which promotes relevance, sustainability and audience value;
- Deliver on the public expectation that the museum will ensure that objects of cultural significance can be enjoyed by all, both now and for generations to come.

## What we are calling for?

- Museums and museum professionals to show their support for this campaign by signing up to this manifesto
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport to recognise the role of good curatorship in delivering excellent museum services
- The Arts Council of England to promote curatorship as a tool for supporting engagement in the Museums Accreditation Scheme
- The Museums Association to acknowledge the role of curatorship in their vision for *Museums 2020* and in future versions of the *Code of Ethics for Museums*
- We call on the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to support research into the public benefit of curatorship
- We call on organisations providing Museum Studies courses to teach more effectively the importance of curatorial knowledge in all aspects of museum work
- The Collections Trust is committed to reflecting the positive, forward-facing role of curatorship within the *SPECTRUM* standard and in the development of strategic Collections Management.

If you would like to join the campaign or find out a bit more then further details can be found at the website: <http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/collaborate/my-groups/viewgroup/139-campaign-for-good-curatorship>

This site will be publishing opinion pieces, petitions and hosting discussions about curatorial issues relating to modern museums and changes to museum standards. Currently, discussions are focusing on creating a new, more accurate definition of a curator. Your support and contributions will be greatly welcomed. It is hoped that the campaign will result in changes to what a responsible museum should be regarded as and that changes to Accreditation and other schemes of best practice will be altered.

**Dr Tim Ewin, Curator of Invertebrate Palaeontology (Echinoderms and Public Enquiries ) Natural History Museum, London.**

## Publications

Three publications that may be of interest to Collection Managers:

Freedman, J. 2011. **Storage of the radioactive mineral collections held at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, UK.** *Collections: A Journal for Museums and Archives Professionals*. Vol. 7. No. 2. pp.201-212

**Abstract:** Devon and Cornwall, in the South West of Britain, have a rich variety of rare and beautiful minerals formed through millions of years of geological change. Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery (PCMAG), in Devon, holds over 10,000 mineral specimens from rare and unique sites across Devon and Cornwall. Held within the main mineral collection at PCMAG are 139 radioactive minerals. This paper explores the best practice for storing the radioactive mineral collection safely in the workplace, minimising any potential hazard and risk to staff and researchers. Included in this paper are examples of how other museums have stored their radioactive minerals safely and includes relevant legislation. The storage project also allowed the opportunity to digitally image the entire radioactive mineral collection permitting PCMAG's database to be updated with images, and new storage information. PCMAG worked closely with a Radiation Protection Advisor for advice and also appointed three Radiation Protection Supervisors to monitor access to the collections and reduce any potential risk further.

Freedman, J. 2012. **Safe Handling and Storage of Potentially Hazardous Minerals in Natural History Collections.** *NatSCA News*. Issue 22. pp.51-56.

**Abstract:** Many minerals in museum collections may pose potential hazards to curators and visitors. This paper discusses the background and use of radioactive minerals and asbestiform minerals, providing examples of safe handling and storage techniques. Toxic elements are also discussed using examples of the more common elements and associated minerals to be found in museum collections including arsenic, mercury, lead and antimony. Historical and current uses of these elements are discussed, along with adverse health effects. Developing a clearer understanding of specimens held in collections allows them to be handled safely, and reduces the common fear of potentially hazardous specimens.

Freedman, J. 2012. **Undertaking an Effective Review of Natural History Collections.** *NatSCA News*. Issue 23. pp.25-42

**Abstract:** Understanding what museums have in their collections is vital to ensure that collections are used, researched and engaged with to their fullest potential. This paper outlines a detailed review of a large spirit collection at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery (PCMAG), with funding from the Museums Association *Effective Collections* programme. Different review methods are discussed including reviews that can be adapted for specific projects. The review resulted in the discovery of two type specimens, two co-type specimens and several scientifically and historically important specimens. 1241 specimens have been highlighted for transfer to other museum. Transferring the specimens has enabled the curatorial staff to focus on the conservation and research for the specimens retained at PCMAG. Although this was carried out for our spirit preserved collections, it can be adaptable to suit any collections review.

## Exhibitions

### ***Archaeopteryx* goes to Wrexham**

The touring *Archaeopteryx* exhibition set up by the National Museum of Wales has recently opened in Wrexham Museum and will remain there until 29th June 2013. This exhibition shows replicas and full size images of each of the 11 known specimens of this iconic missing-link, along with additional Solnhofen fossils. Contact Wrexham Museum (01978 297460) for opening hours. Admission is free.

### **Museum cuts in the news**

This information is from publically available news reports at [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) and [www.nationalmuseums.org.uk](http://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk).

#### **Newcastle museum cuts**

More detail has emerged of Newcastle Council's plans to substantially reduce support for museums. Indications are that support for the Great North Museum may be cut completely. Probable results include shorter opening hours, cuts in education programmes, more charged admission and fewer exhibitions coming to Newcastle from outside.

#### **Sheffield cuts**

Sheffield Council is also trying to save £50m from its budget and is therefore cutting its spend on culture by 20%. Museums Sheffield is projected to lose £200k per year.

#### **National Museums Wales plans large scale restructuring**

National Museums Wales is beginning talks with 650 staff spread over seven museum sites about restructuring. The service has seen its funding cut by £5m over three years (beginning in 2011). Under the proposals, 35 posts are to go, with 160 more being affected. The main changes will be to collections, research and learning, new media provision and exhibitions. Union representatives expressed concern about the loss of expertise to the service. The consultation will continue for three months. Last year NMW saw its best visitor figures since free entry was introduced in 2001, with 1.69 million visitors.

## Collections in the news

### **New species of crocodilian: *Tyrannoneustes lythrodictikos* found in Museum drawer.**

Researcher Mark Young discovered that fossils collected by fossil hunter Alfred Leeds around 1907-1909 turned out to contain a new species of crocodilian from the Middle Jurassic. The specimens were residing in a drawer at the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow, Scotland until Young and his colleagues rediscovered them. The dolphin shaped crocodilian would have been one of the

top predators around in the Jurassic Published in the Systematic Journal of Palaeontology 2012 p1-39.

### **Oldest Dinosaur found at the Natural History Museum.**

What is thought to be one of the earliest dinosaurs has been discovered in the collections at the Natural History Museum. *Nyasasaurus parringtoni*, a dog sized dinosaur with a five-foot tail is from the Middle Triassic. The specimen was collected in Tanzania in the 1930's by Rex Parrington hence the name. The well known palaeontologist Alan Charig described the specimens in the 1950's but the work was never properly published until now. [www.washington.edu](http://www.washington.edu) quotes one of the authors, Paul Barrett as saying: **"This work highlights the important role of museums in housing specimens whose scientific importance might be overlooked unless studied and restudied in detail, many of the more important discoveries in paleontology are made in the lab, or museum storerooms, as well as in the field."**

### **Important Fossil Turtle discovered after being lost for 150 years**

A fossil turtle, one of four described by the famous naturalist Sir Richard Owen, has been discovered in the collections at Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales (NMW) after being missing for 150 years! Research into two of the specimens at the Natural History Museum, London lead the curator Dr Andrew Milner to try to trace the others and eventually the paper trail lead to NMW.

The NMW specimen was originally collected by Joseph Channing Pearce in Bath. His collection was kept by his family until it entered Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in 1915. Much of the Bristol Collections were lost in the Second World War, however, amazingly the catalogue had a note saying *Chelone obovata – Sent to Cardiff Museum, 3rd March 1933*. Cardiff Museum collections became part of the National Collections and there the specimen was discovered. The original description of the four fossils by Richard Owen describes the Cardiff specimen as the type so this is a very important discovery. See [www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/rhagor/article/fossil\\_turtle](http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/rhagor/article/fossil_turtle) for the full story.

**Is there a future for collections?** Read this from the **Future for Museums** blog spot: [www.futureofmuseums.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/no-future.html](http://www.futureofmuseums.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/no-future.html)

### **Forthcoming seminars and workshops**

Check our website [www.geocurator.org](http://www.geocurator.org) for updates to our seminar programme.

#### **25th—26th April 2013 'Doing More with Less'**

Geological Curators' Group Meeting, Guernsey Museums & Galleries, Guernsey

A chance to visit the natural history collections of Guernsey Museums and Art Galleries (GMAG) before the current (and first) Natural Science Curator and Geologist, Alan Howell, retires in May 2014.

The first day will include visits to the new museum storage units and the second day will include a field excursion. It is hoped that this meeting will include a discussion session on the demise of specialist curators—very topical in the current climate of cuts. Please see our web site [www.geocurators.org](http://www.geocurators.org) for updates or contact the Programme Secretary **Jim Spenser** on [cheirotherium@gmail.com](mailto:cheirotherium@gmail.com). A Booking form is attached.

### **27th August 2013 SPPC Symposium**

The 22nd Symposium of **Palaeontological Preparation and Conservation** (SPPC), jointly meeting with the **Geological Curators' Group** (GCG), will be hosted by National Museums Scotland on 27th August, 2013. This combined meeting will be followed by the 61st Symposium of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Comparative Anatomy (SVPCA; 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August), which will include a field trip to important Palaeozoic fossiliferous sites in the Scottish Borders on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August.

Platform and poster presentations on all aspects of geological and palaeontological preparation, conservation and curation are invited for the combined SPPC/GCG meeting, and on all aspects of vertebrate palaeontology for the SVPCA meeting. Further details for both meetings will be available in the first circular, which will be circulated in March. If you are interested in attending either of these meetings and would like to be included on the mailing list, please contact **Vicen Carrió-Lluesma** ([v.carrio@nms.ac.uk](mailto:v.carrio@nms.ac.uk)) for SPPC/GCG or **Stig Walsh** ([s.walsh@nms.ac.uk](mailto:s.walsh@nms.ac.uk)) for SVPCA.

### **18-20 September 2013 1<sup>st</sup> International Conservation Symposium Workshop – Natural History Collections,**

The Centre de Restauacio I Interpretacio Paleontologic, Barcelona, Spain. The main purpose of this symposium-workshop is to emphasize all those concepts related to protection and conservation of Natural History Collections. For a full list of speakers and workshops see the flyer at <http://www.igme.es/internet/novedades/congresos/1st%20Program-%20NEW.pdf> or contact **Sandra Val** [sval@crip.cat](mailto:sval@crip.cat)

### **Keep in contact**

Web site: [Geocurator.org](http://Geocurator.org)

NEW!!! Facebook: Geological Curators' Group.  
NEW!!! Twitter: OriginalGCG and hashtag #GCG.

**GCG Meeting and Seminar 'Doing more with less'**  
**25th-26th April 2013**  
**Guernsey Museums & Galleries, Guernsey**  
**BOOKING FORM**

I will be attending the seminar on 25th April

I will be attending the visits on 26th April (price to be confirmed)

I would like details of local accommodation

I enclose payment for £25 (which includes seminar, a buffet lunch , teas and coffees on Thursday 25th)

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

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

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

Please return this booking form with a cheque for £25, made payable to "Geological Curators Group" **by 15th April** to : 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

✂.....

Reach geology curators everywhere and

# Advertise in this space

Full page and half pages available. Multiple copy deals.

Contact: John Nudds [john.nudds@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:john.nudds@manchester.ac.uk)

## Editor's Note

Thanks to all those who sent me articles and reports for this edition of Coprolite. Please keep sending information you think may be of interest to our members.  
**Helen Kerbey, National Museum Wales.**

GEOLOGICAL  
CURATORS  
GROUP



Affiliated to the  
Geological Society of London  
registered charity no. 296050