

No. 33, Winter 1997



NEWSLETTER CONTENTS



- [Palaeontology Contents \(Volume 40, part 1\)](#)
- [Editorial](#)
- [Association Meetings Programme](#)
- [Association Business](#)
- [Announcements](#)
- [Palaeo-Comment - Replies](#)
- [Meeting Reports](#)
- [Future Meetings of Other Bodies](#)
- [Book Reviews](#)
- [About the Newsletter](#)
- [About the Palaeontological Association](#)



Editorial

Barrie Rickards

After several years of editing the Newsletter I hand over with this issue to Sue Rigby, and I do so willingly! I'd like to wish her success, which is really saying that I hope members will make her job easier by sending in suggestions from time to time. It's not a task that can be done in isolation. I'd also like to thank Douglas Palmer and Sue Rigby for their help to me during my time as Editor, but most especially I must thank Lori Snyder who has been quite splendid in running the show. Margaret Johnston in Earth Sciences at Cambridge has also smoothed the way most efficiently for production of the Newsletter. Some older members may well remember the times when appearance of the Newsletter did seem a little serendipitous. One of our first objectives was to bring it out on time, and in a fairly standard format: without Lori's help this could not have happened. As an aside I should mention that in the past several years the Newsletter has been late only twice, on each occasion by one week. Not only did no one seem to notice, but the cause of the delay in each case was a failure by some Council members to get their copy in on time!

For some time now we have been in a position to think about changing the format, as well as the contents, for the letter. I'm sure Sue Rigby would welcome ideas. We have recently tried the Palaeo-Comment slot and this has certainly been well subscribed to by those with strong feelings on the status and value of collections held in private hands. But to what extent do we want to have debate of this kind in the Newsletter? Could the debate be held elsewhere? Should the Newsletter be expanded, and if so at what cost? Personally I like the idea of such discussions, and it is difficult to see where else they could or should be held.

In [No. 30, Liz Bull, in Palaeo-Comment](#), discussed the matter of palaeontological research outside Universities. One can only applaud her comments, but perhaps discussion could be widened to include the whole question of amateur contributions to the science. Historically such contributions have been considerable. In modern times we have recognized some of them by the annual award to amateur palaeontologists, but the very nature of the Palaeontological Association mitigates against much active participation by amateurs in the Association's activities. Is this a good thing? Is not the level of interest in palaeontology by amateurs on the increase? Should we not be considering widening the membership of the Association? What will be the long term effect on interest in palaeontology, by the increased proportion of earth science disciplines in the school

curriculum? (Not to mention the effect of positive events which occur at intervals, such as 'Jurassic Park' or, indeed, Simon Conway Morris' Christmas lectures.)

I am inclined to the view that while there may be a decline in the proportion of palaeontologists employed in the usual institutions, and perhaps in the overall number of palaeontologists, there is a considerable increase taking place in the field of amateur palaeontology. As an association we may ignore that growth at our peril. Or is the amateur palaeontologist adequately catered for by local geological societies or by the G.A?

The Association's membership figures have been stable for a couple of years or so, but what has been the trend over the last decade, and what is the likely trend in the next? These matters have been discussed to some extent in Council, but I think they should be discussed more widely. Does opening the doors of the Association involve insurmountable problems with respect to the Statutes? Should a working party be set up, to report to the Council? Or is the Palaeo-Comment slot sufficient to allow wide debate? Of course, if no one sends in any views on these matters then most of my questions become irrelevant. Most of them, but not all: perhaps we should be taking a hard look at the whole range of functions and objectives of the Palaeontological Association.

[Back to Contents](#)



ASSOCIATION BUSINESS

PROPOSED SUBSCRIPTION REDUCTIONS

Council is proposing the following reductions for 1998, which will be voted on at the 1997 Annual General Meeting:

Subscriptions to *Palaeontology*: Student Membership decreases to £10 or US\$18 (1997 rate: £11.50 or US\$20). It is proposed to reduce the Retired Membership from £14 to £12.

No other changes are proposed.

ADDITIONAL NOMINATION FOR COUNCIL

Editor Dr A. R. Hemsley (University of Wales College of Cardiff)

Proposed - Dr C. J. Cleal, seconded - Dr D. M. Unwin

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1996

MEMBERSHIP & SUBSCRIPTIONS. Membership totalled 978 on 31 December 1996, an increase of 23 from the previous year. There were 679 Ordinary Members, a decrease of 7; 100 Retired Members, an increase of 3; 199 Student Members, an increase of 27; and 228 Institutional Members, a decrease of 14 from last year. Total Individual and Institutional subscriptions to *Palaeontology* through Blackwell's agency numbered 412, down from 426.

Subscriptions to *Special Papers in Palaeontology* numbered 110 individuals, an increase of 5, and 101 institutions, a decrease of 1.

Sales of *Field Guides to Fossils* by the Marketing Manager amounted to:

Fossil Plants of the London Clay - £490;

Fossils of the Chalk - £1252;

Zechstein Reef Fossils and their Palaeoecology - £210;

Fossils of the Oxford Clay - £1500;

Fossils of the Santana and Crato Formations of North East Brazil - £676;

Plant Fossils of the British Coal Measures - £1155;

Fossils of the Upper Ordovician - £980.

The Atlas of Invertebrate Macrofossils yielded £127 in income and *The Fossil Record 2* yielded £79 in royalties.

FINANCE. During 1996, the Association published Volume 39 of *Palaeontology* at a cost of £85,298. *Special Papers in Palaeontology* 52-55 were published at a cost respectively, of £8175, £5556, £6679 and £8840. Financial provision was made for the publication of *Special Papers in Palaeontology* 56 at £5250.

The Association is very grateful to Prof. F. Hodson for the third of four covenanted gifts of £1333.34. The Association also transferred £25,000 from the publications reserve account into the Sylvester-Bradley Fund in order to increase income from interest and provide more funding through the awards.

PUBLICATIONS. Four parts of Volume 39 of *Palaeontology* were published during 1996, together comprising 1082 pages. *Special Papers in Palaeontology* 52 (for 1994), 53-54 (for 1995) and 55 (for 1996) were published.

We are grateful to Cambridge University Press, the National Museum of Wales and the University of Birmingham for providing storage facilities for our backstock.

Council is indebted to Miss M. Johnston and the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge for assistance with the publication and distribution of *Palaeontology Newsletter*. Production of the newsletter is scheduled to transfer to Edinburgh in 1997 and Council would like to take this opportunity to express their thanks to Dr R. B. Rickards, Mrs L. Snyder and Miss M. Johnston for their assistance in efficiently producing the newsletter over a number of years.

MEETINGS. Five meetings were held in 1996, and the Association extends its thanks to the organizers and host institutions of all these meetings.

a. Lyell Meeting - 'Use of stable isotopes in palaeontology'. 27 February.

Hosted by the Joint Committee for Palaeontology in Burlington House and organized by Prof. J. D. Hudson and Dr J. D. Marshall. Around 100 people attended.

b. Thirty-ninth Annual General Meeting and Address. 13 March.

Held in the Sutton Lecture Theatre, Royal School of Mines, Imperial College. The address, 'All-time giants', was given by Prof. R. McNeill Alexander FRS (University of Leeds). Sylvester-Bradley Awards were made to Dr E. Bull (Elgin), Miss Peta Hayes (University of Leeds) and Mr R. Kemp (University of Bristol). Approximately 50 people attended.

c. Review Seminar - Exceptional preservation of fossils: processes and perspectives. 20 March.

Organized by Dr D. Martill and Dr M. J. Barker, and held at the University of Portsmouth. The attendance was 66.

d. Progressive Palaeontology. 24 April.

An open meeting for presentations by research students held in the Postgraduate Research Institute for Sedimentology, University of Reading and organized by Vicky Beck and Chris Perry. Around 40 people attended.

e. 40th Annual Meeting - 16-19 December.

Held at the University of Birmingham and organized by Dr M. P. Smith and Dr A. T. Thomas. The President's Award was made to P. C. J. Donoghue (University of Leicester) for his talk on 'Mammal-like occlusion in conodonts'. The meeting included a field excursion to

Wenlock Edge, Shropshire. 215 people attended the meeting, the largest ever turn out for an Annual Meeting. The seventh Award to Amateur Palaeontologists was presented to Mr Carl Horrocks of Eccles, Greater Manchester, at the Annual Dinner.

COUNCIL. The following members were elected to serve on Council at the AGM on 13 March:

President - Prof. D. Edwards FRS; Vice Presidents - Dr J. A. Crame, Dr P. D. Lane; Treasurer - Dr T. J. Palmer; Membership Treasurer - Dr M. J. Barker; Institutional Membership Treasurer - Dr J. E. Francis; Secretary - Dr M. P. Smith; Newsletter Editor - Dr R. B. Rickards; Newsletter Reporter - Dr S. Rigby; Marketing Manager - Dr A. King; Publicity Officer - Dr M. A. Purnell; Editors - Dr C. J. Cleal, Dr B. M. Cox, Dr P. Doyle, Dr D. A. T. Harper, Dr R. M. Owens, Dr D. M. Unwin.

Council is indebted to the Department of Palaeontology, Natural History Museum, the Royal School of Mines, and the University of Birmingham for providing Council Meeting venues through the year.

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES. During 1996, the Association continued to consolidate its financial position, and this allowed a number of new initiatives to be launched. As noted above, reserves were transferred to the Sylvester-Bradley Fund and this will allow up to five Awards of £500 to be made each year. In order to streamline the processing of orders for the *Field Guides to Fossils* series and of back orders, the marketing of these aspects has been contracted out to Blackwell Publishers. It is estimated that the decrease in revenue as a result of Blackwell's commission will be more than compensated by an increase in the volume of sales.

The [Association Web site](#) continues to develop and the site has been visited over 6,000 times since it was established, making it the third most popular destination within the overall Paleonet Pages system. In order to build on this success, the Association has become a founding co-sponsor of a new electronic academic journal, *Palaeontologica Electronica*, to be launched in 1997. The journal will contain peer-reviewed articles on any palaeontological or related biological topic, together with reviews of books, meetings and other web sites.

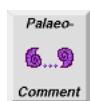
A membership survey was conducted by Council in 1996, organized by Drs Barker and Doyle. The respondents thought that the Association provided a

good service to the membership with high quality publications suited to their intended audiences. With regard to membership, Council proposes that a new category of Honorary Life Member be created, to be awarded to those who have given exceptional service to the Association.

M. P. Smith
Secretary

Note that the printed version of the Newsletter contains draft income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 December 1996

[Back to Contents](#)



Palaeo-Comment

Replies to *Palaeo*-comments on specimens in private collections:

1. [Specimens in private collections - editorial responsibilities by Angela Milner](#)
2. [Specimens in private collections by Steve Etches](#)
3. [Specimens in private collections by Steve Tunnickliff](#)
4. [Specimens in private collections by Michael Taylor and Peter Crowther](#)

Specimens in private collections - editorial responsibilities

[David Loydell \(Newsletter 31: 6\)](#) raised the matter of whether editors [of *Palaeontology*] should accept for publication papers in which privately held specimens are described and illustrated. It is unfortunate that this important point was not aired before a precedent was set in *Palaeontology* **39**(3) with the description and figures of a new solifugid spider, the holotype of which is held in a private collection.

I and my colleagues in the Palaeontology Department at the Natural History Museum support fully the remarks made by [Patrick Wyse Jackson in a reply to David Loydell \(Newsletter 32:5\)](#). It is a fundamental tenet of science that results should be verifiable. In the case of systematics and taxonomy, it is essential that published specimens, especially type and figured 'voucher' specimens which are primary reference material, should be freely accessible to subsequent researchers in perpetuity. The only way to provide a reasonable long term guarantee of that is for the material to be

deposited permanently in a recognized institution, and editors can encourage that process with a strict acceptance policy. Problems caused as far back as 120 years ago are still with us. For example, some material in Richard Owen's series of monographs of fossil reptiles remained in private hands and cannot now be traced! A modern repeat of that situation is in no one's interest.

[David Martill, in a second reply to David Loydell \(Newsletter 32:6\)](#) pleads for editorial discretion and bemoans the many wonderful fossil reptile specimens held in private collections that should be made available to science. I share his sense of frustration - there are fine specimens I know of, too, that I would dearly like to see described, but we compromise the future health of our subject if we encourage what are, in effect, anecdotal contributions about specimens that may never be seen again. Some private collectors are receptive to depositing specimens to be published; others can be persuaded of the importance of scientific ethics and principles. Some, of course, will never consider the possibility of parting with their material. I can even cite examples of potential bequests that have run into difficulties. These are the uncomfortable facts we have to live with.

Palaeontology as a leading international journal for our science cannot afford to let professional standards slip. Editorial policy must be strict and papers including privately owned material should not be published.

*Angela C. Milner
Head of Fossil Vertebrates Division
Department of Palaeontology
The Natural History Museum
Cromwell Road
London SW7 5BD*

Back to list of [Palaeo-replies](#)

Specimens in private collections - editorial responsibilities

As an amateur collector and curator of Kimmeridge Clay fossils I agree in principle with the aims stated in [Palaeo-Comment I \(Newsletter 31:6\)](#) but I have some comments to make on behalf of the responsible amateur collector.

I do not deal in fossils, but would consider buying an important Kimmeridge Clay specimen to save it being sold abroad; I have never

considered selling any of my material.

Most, if not all, of my material I have collected and prepared myself. Collecting specimens is a laborious, tiring and often dangerous occupation. Fossils do not often lie on the beach waiting to be collected - it takes a trained eye to spot clues, sometimes only millimetres across, which indicate the presence of a fossil within the fallen block on the beach. Initial trimming requires a knowledge of how the rock will break and how much dross to remove. Walking several miles home carrying a back-breaking load in a 100 litre rucksack is followed by immediate preservation techniques to delay the onset of shrinkage, oxidation etc. of the specimens.

Next, the specimen has to be prepared and conserved. Equipment is expensive both to buy and to run and specimens sometimes take several weeks to prepare working in a cold outhouse at evenings and weekends. Skills have to be acquired so as not to damage the specimens. All this involves a lot of time and effort and adds greatly to the intrinsic value of each specimen - each one has a special history and a value all of its own.

The rewards are tremendous - complete, fully articulated fish; trachyteuthids complete with soft part preservation; giant pliosaur elements; ichthyosaur paddles never seen before; scavenged and predated remains indicating food chains, and much, much more.

I love my hobby and have constructed a museum at home in which to display the material. An extensive, accurate record is kept recording details about each specimen, stored both on card index and computer data base. The museum is humidity controlled and the specimens are preserved and cared for to the best of my ability. My collection is unique and is the most comprehensive collection of Kimmeridge Clay fossils collected from the Dorset coast.

I am not just interested in collecting and displaying the fossils, I am fascinated by the information that can be gleaned from the material and have always been keen to allow *bona fide* researchers access to the collection - all that is required is a telephone call to make an appointment.

I am aware that the collection is now very valuable, not just in monetary terms, but intrinsically and scientifically. The collection is not just the sum of its parts; it paints an overall picture of life in the Jurassic seas which can be studied as a whole, as well as giving information about each individual species. Bearing this in mind, it is understandable that I should not wish to

part with any individual specimen. In the past I have lent specimens to researchers and have regretfully come to the conclusion that researchers are only interested in the information a specimen can yield, often to the extent of desecration and even destruction. Once their paper has been published all interest in the specimen itself vanishes; I have had to travel hundreds of miles to retrieve "lent" specimens and have lost some through clumsy researcher investigation. There are plenty of incomplete specimens on which to experiment - they only have to ask; why does it have to be the best and most complete that are destroyed in this way? I am very willing to grant access to the specimens, but there must be binding agreements on both sides on terms and conditions of borrowing.

Many of my specimens are subject to pyrite decay and have to be constantly monitored and dealt with. I have visited many provincial and national museums and have been dismayed at the underfunding, understaffing and under-provided state of affairs. The curators are all very friendly, helpful and obliging and have granted me unlimited access, but they are not able to provide the level of care and attention that I feel is necessary to keep the collections in good order. It is not their fault and they are well aware of the problems. They do the best they can within the confines of bureaucracy and limited cash - but there is no incentive for me to donate my specimens into their safe-keeping. I have no desire to see all my years of hard work, interest and expertise disintegrate into piles of dust.

So don't just knock the amateur collector for his reluctance to donate special, individual specimens to 'acceptable' museums. The points raised by David Loydell are very reasonable, but there have to be responsible agreements by **all** parties in this matter.

*Steve Etches
Kimmeridge*

Back to list of [Palaeo-replies](#)

Specimens in private collections - editorial responsibilities

[David Loydell \(Newsletter 31:6\)](#) described the problem of specimens in private collections as "horribly complex" and yet the obvious solution - that specimens must be passed to a recognized repository and thus acquire recognized specimen or acquisition numbers before editors will allow them to be figured or cited - seems so simple. [Patrick Wyse Jackson \(Newsletter 32:5-6\)](#) and [Dave Martill \(Newsletter 32:6\)](#) have argued respectively for the

strict application of ICZN and GCG Guidelines and for a more tolerant approach.

On the one hand we have the simple solution: give the specimen a reliable museum number and publish. On the other hand, the somewhat dodgier process: publish and hope that one day the specimen will pass into the 'public domain' either by sale, donation or as part of a legacy.

Cards on the table time: I would subscribe to the Wyse Jackson authoritarian approach but nevertheless, I can appreciate the predicament, which Dave Martill describes, of being aware of specimens which furnish valuable information but which, because of their being held privately, are effectively unavailable to science.

The second option seems to me to be fraught with uncertainty as outlined by both Loydell and Wyse Jackson. Not least is how a later user of the published work would know where to start looking for the material whether still in private hands or in a museum. These days even knowing which continent to start on could be problematic. Most curators find themselves searching records and collections every now and then in response to an enquirer seeking the so-and-so collection. Very often a Victorian private collector is at the root of the quest and wonderful and fascinating detective work by others may provide clues (e.g. Cleevely, 1983; *Geological Curator passim*) but let us not aspire to Victorian values in this case and let us not wish such problems on future researchers and curators. As for specimens passing to a collection when people die, it is hard enough to get our own numbered specimens back when the borrower dies.

That leaves the first option, the simple choice. But beware, even this has its pitfalls, and here I write with first-hand experience. An anecdote will suffice.

A well-respected worker in a particular field writes to the Curator along these lines:

"I am preparing a paper on such-and-such which will include three new taxa. I intend to donate the sixteen type specimens to your collection once the paper is published and would like to be able to quote the registered numbers in the text and plate descriptions. Could you supply me with the appropriate numbers?"

In a spirit of co-operation, the Curator dispatches sixteen printed numbers to the author with a request that they be fixed to the specimens. An entry in the registration system records that the numbers were '*issued to so-and-so, details awaited*'.

With luck a year or two later the paper is published including details of the specimens which all the world would now assume to be in the Curator's care. The Curator is able to fill in some of the detail in his register and awaits the arrival of the specimens. He waits. And waits. But fortunately he has plenty of other things to do and eventually he forgets that he is still waiting. Then a couple of years later he gets a letter from another researcher asking to borrow the type specimens figured by so-and-so. After a bit of head-scratching and searching, the apologetic Curator has to own up that he has never received the specimens, the author gets a reputation for being a devious, retentive or negligent worker, and the researcher has to struggle on in the absence of important type material.

This cautionary tale does, of course, beg several philosophical questions: should a curator issue numbers without sight of the specimens?; does he have any right to demand a specimen from a donor?; what does he do if the donor does not in the end part with the specimens?; and so on.

And while we're in the realms of philosophy (or maybe psychology), what I really cannot understand is why someone who clearly recognizes the importance of a specimen, such as a pterosaur with a keratinous beak ([Martill, Newsletter 32:6](#)), hangs on to it rather than sharing it with the rest of us. I am not sure that stamp-collecting is the right analogy, more dogs-in-mangers to my mind. Why is the ordinary member of the public who has found something on his holidays which might be a fossil (but probably isn't) often so desperate to give it to your collection in the hope that it will further the cause of a science which he admits he knows little about, but a knowledgeable private collector will clutch a unique specimen to his bosom knowing its scientific value?

CLEEVELY, R. J. 1983. *World Palaeontological Collections*. 365 pp. B.M.(N.H.) London.

Steve Tunnicliff
Curator, Biostratigraphy Collections
British Geological Survey, Keyworth, Notts.

Back to list of [Palaeo-replies](#)

Specimens in private collections - editorial responsibilities

We are pleased to see from [David Loydell's *Palaeo-Comment in Newsletter 31*](#) and the [replies provoked in *Newsletter 32*](#) that the Palaeontological Association's editors are publicly airing the problem of private material. We've long been concerned at so many papers in journals generally that are based partly or wholly on material in private hands. David Loydell makes a brave, but we feel unsuccessful, attempt to sort out how and when it might be made acceptable to cite privately held specimens in a scientific paper. We believe that the answer is very simple: it's *never* acceptable. Such publication formally confers scientific importance on a specimen and the specimen's availability to science must be guaranteed. We also think it more useful to define when a collection is an unacceptable repository for published material by defining just what is an acceptable repository.

Leaving published specimens in private hands simply does not work, even if they are 'promised' or lent to a museum (the owner can still be forced to break the promise if the need for money becomes imperative, as in the event of disability). Obviously, we can't discuss modern cases, but, to take one historical example, W. D. Conybeare and H. T. De la Beche apparently had problems getting at specimens in private hands when they wrote up the ichthyosaur and plesiosaur in the 1820s. There seems no other way to explain why these gentlemen 'missed' so many marine reptiles known to have existed in private collections. Of the specimens which they did use, many have been dispersed and some have disappeared. No wonder Conybeare and De la Beche helped found the Bristol Institution and its fine geological collection (Taylor, 1994).

We decline to use privately held specimens in our own research (and one of us is a marine reptile worker, who knows plenty of people with really good, even unique, specimens). We feel very strongly that all specimens cited in a journal must be formally accessioned in the collections of a recognized public museum if the journal is to be scientifically respectable. There is no alternative if research is to be repeatable, to have long-term scientific value. Private specimens vanish, and casts and photos are never as good. *Pace* Dave Martill's remarks on Mesozoic beasts from lithographic limestones, research based on casts and photos is just not good enough, especially if controversy arises.

Mixing public and private spheres can be inherently difficult. Against the wish to be helpful to colleagues, collectors and the public generally, one

must set the presumption that too much publicly funded effort should not be put into enhancing the value of private property without due recompense. Some commercial dealers pay academic specialists fees for identifying and reporting privately on major specimens. However, we suspect that few such palaeontologists have considered the issue of professional liability. Moreover, although we're ignorant of the exact legal situation, it seems to us that publishing scholarly papers on a specimen - i.e., putting one's professionalism to its key test - could incur liability for the commercial consequences, for instance of a misidentification. In any case, those of us who are museum staff are already severely restricted as to what we can say about privately owned specimens; valuations are forbidden, and identification services are offered on the understanding that no liability is accepted for the resulting comments: hardly consistent with writing a scientific paper on the same specimen.

We are *not* saying that museums should have all specimens; under the various laws of the land in Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales, private ownership of fossils is permitted (Taylor & Harte, 1988, 1991). In fact, it's often positively encouraged because of the educational and spiritual benefits of fossil collecting, and we agree with this. We therefore must, and do, accept the existence of prize specimens in private hands. Personally, we often enjoy seeing these fruits of their collectors' hard work. Nevertheless, we simply don't write them up until the owners give or sell them to museums (in which case we do try to get them published promptly). That way, we know that all the specimens we publish will remain available. Given the pressures on our time, we don't believe we would publish that many more papers if we also wrote up specimens in private hands, and a significant proportion of these papers would, often sooner rather than later, lose their value when the specimens disappear.

Journals, which share in the process of giving the specimens their importance, have a responsibility to science to insist that the specimens are in a suitable repository. Happily, the latest Pal. Ass. 'Publication Policy and Practice' is already quite clear on this issue:

'Preservation of types and other specimens. In accordance with the recommendations of the International Codes of Botanical and Zoological Nomenclature, all illustrated and described specimens *must* be registered and deposited in an appropriate permanent institution, with staff and facilities capable of ensuring their conservation and availability for future reference in perpetuity.

The registered numbers *must* be quoted.' ('Notes for authors...', 1996, *Palaeontology* vol. 39(4))

This means that *any* specimen which forms the basis for a taxonomic description, phylogenetic analysis, palaeoecological analysis, etc., *must* have its future accessibility guaranteed by being deposited in a public institution. A 'promise' is not enough, *pace* Patrick Wyse Jackson - the specimen *must* be formally part of the collection (if it's still physically in the researcher's hands, it assumes the status of a loan). 'Long loans' to museums are usually unacceptable to reputable institutions; they incur recurrent costs and responsibilities without long-term security. The typical exception, a loan agreed to enable the public display for a fixed period, is irrelevant to this discussion.

David Loydell perhaps misses the point by his emphasis on 'private' collections. The term is too ambiguous: anyone can call his or her private collection a 'museum' and open it to the public. So does it then become 'public'? Rather, and here we come to Patrick Wyse Jackson's point about adequate provision, the question must be: what is an acceptable 'public' repository for published material, and how can it do its job 'in perpetuity'? It must do the right thing by the collections, not only when it's operating, but also if one day it should ever close down.

Fortunately in the UK we have the Registration of Museums scheme overseen mainly by the Museums and Galleries Commission (not to be confused with the registration of specimens in a catalogue). To be Registered, a museum is forced to think through its aims and operations and expose them to external assessment. It has to conform to at least basic legal criteria, usually by being a public body or charitable trust, and accepting the presumption that it holds its collections in trust for the public rather than 'owning' them. It must also have a worked-out policy on basic matters, notably those concerning its collections. Crucially, disposal of the collections is restricted; this must take place by transfer to another museum as the first resort (rather than, for instance, by open public sale). Thus do impermanent institutions achieve true perpetuity. So Pal. Ass., we suggest, should adopt a rule restricting citation of any specimens held in the UK to those in Registered museums.

You may think this draconian, but it's paralleled in other fields. To comply with English Heritage-funded grants, archaeologists *must* deposit excavated material in one of a small, formally specified, shortlist of museums with the right staff and approved storage facilities. Likewise, reputable medical

journals are coming to insist that authors of papers on clinical trials retain all the raw data for a fixed period, typically ten years, and protein crystallographers are increasingly required to place their raw data in a central repository before they can publish their structural analyses.

There is no excuse for a serious repository not being Registered, especially as this is increasingly a criterion for public funding. Most museums of all sizes, from the National Museums of Scotland and the Ulster Museum to the tiniest local institution, are Registered. So too are many university collections, mostly the publicly open museums such as Oxford University Museum but also departmental collections such as the Department of Geology at Bristol University.

You should therefore be wary of museums and collections that are not Registered. Some, especially new concerns, are of course working towards Registration, and we wish them the best of luck. But others are basically private operations - whether they are overtly commercial or not is irrelevant - and anyone who donates material or uses them for research has no safeguards.

So what is one to make of the many university departmental 'research' collections which lack 'Registered' status? They are, in truth, private collections which can be dumped or sold the day after the last palaeontologist retires, as Patrick Wyse Jackson comments (arguably a scandalous state of affairs when you consider their near-total dependence on public funding). Remember, too, that the 'permanent institution' of Pal. Ass. *Publication Policy and Practice* should have 'staff and facilities capable of ensuring [the collections'] conservation and availability for future reference, in perpetuity'. This means a competent *curatorial* staff, certainly including natural sciences or geological specialists for institutions holding type material (as specified by the *International Code for Zoological Nomenclature*). Merely being a researcher or teacher in the field is not sufficient.

If we therefore exclude all U.K. specimens not held in Registered collections from *Palaeontology* and *Special Papers in Palaeontology*, we will inevitably exclude many university specimens. But the long-term value of the Association's publications requires as much.

References

TAYLOR, M. A. 1994. The plesiosaur's birthplace: the Bristol Institution and its contribution to vertebrate palaeontology. *Zoological Journal of the*

Linnean Society **112**, 179-96.

TAYLOR, M. A. & HARTE, J. D. C. 1988. Paleontological site conservation and the law in Britain. *Special Papers in Palaeontology* **40**, 21-39.

TAYLOR, M. A. & HARTE, J. D. C. 1991. The local geologist 4: fossils, minerals and the law. *Geology Today* **7**, 189-93.

Michael A. Taylor
Department of Geology and Zoology
National Museums of Scotland
Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF
and
Peter R. Crowther
Department of Geology, Ulster Museum
Botanic Gardens, Belfast BT9 5AB

[Back to Contents](#) or list of [Palaeo-replies](#)



FUTURE MEETINGS OF OTHER BODIES

Molecules and Morphology in Systematics

Paris

24 - 28 March 1997

For further information, contact Simon Tillier (Molecules & Morphology), Service de Systematique moleculaire, Museum national d'Histoire naturelle, 43, rue Cuvier, 75005 Paris, France. E-mail: tillier@mnhn.fr; Tel: (33) 01 40 79 38 96; Fax: (33) 01 40 79 38 44. Website: <http://www.mnhn.fr>

British and Irish Graptolite Group (BIG G)

Keyworth, Nottingham

26 April 1997

The last meeting in Edinburgh was Big G's 21st. The next, at B.G.S. Keyworth on April 26th, will celebrate the first 10 years. Anyone is welcome to the celebration. Contact Adrian Rushton at the BGS.

BMS Demonstration Meeting

Birmingham
30 April 1997

The British Micropalaeontological Society is holding a demonstration meeting in the Lapworth Museum, School of Earth Sciences, University of Birmingham. This is an open meeting where members and non-members can demonstrate any aspect of their work. There is no registration fee. Contributions from students are particularly welcome and there is a cash prize of £50 for the best student demonstration of the meeting.

Contact Philip Donoghue, School of Earth Sciences, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT. Tel: 0121 414 4523; E-mail p.c.j.donoghue@bham.ac.uk or

Paul Smith, School of Earth Sciences, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT. Tel: 0121 414 4173; E-mail m.p.smith@bham.ac.uk

Conference on Australasian Vertebrate Evolution, Palaeontology and Systematics (CAVEPS)

Perth, Western Australia
7 - 11 July 1997

Pre- and post-meeting field trips to the Kimberley (Broome, Blina Shale, Gogo) and Margaret River region (Pleistocene mammals). Contact John Long or Alex Baynes for details, Australia (09) 427 2757; fax (09) 328 8686 or email: long@muswa.dialix.oz.au

Second European Palaeontological Congress - Climates: Past, Present and Future

Vienna, Austria
10 - 12 July 1997

Under the auspices of the European Palaeontological Association, the Second European Palaeontological Congress will be held in Vienna from the 10th to 12th of July 1997. The theme of the conference will be 'Climates: Past, Present and Future'. The idea is to emphasize the role which palaeontology can play in the Global Change debate. For further information, contact Dr Heinz Kollmann, Natural History Museum, Burgring 7, A-1014 Vienna, Austria. Fax: + 43-1-5235254; Telex: 134441

natur a

Devonian Cyclicity and Sequence Stratigraphy

University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, USA
20 - 27 July 1997

IUGS Subcommittee on Devonian Stratigraphy and University of Rochester Symposium and fieldtrips

Contact: Carlton E. Brett, Dept. of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York 14627, USA. Tel: + 1 (716) 275-2408; Fax: +1 (716) 244-5689. E-mail: cebh@db1.cc.rochester.edu or William T. Kirchgasser, Dept. of Geology, SUNY Potsdam, Potsdam, NY 13676 Tel: + 1 (315) 267-2296; Fax: + 1 (315) 267-2695. E-mail: kirchgwt@potsdam.edu

PaleoForams '97

Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, USA
17 - 21 August 1997

Examining all aspects of Paleozoic Foraminifera and their stratigraphic and geographic distribution. An initial list of topics for which talks and/or posters are solicited include: Evolution, dispersal and paleobiogeography; Classification and taxonomy; Biostratigraphy and zonation; Paleoecology and sedimentary environments of deposition; Biological interpretations and significance; Numerical and statistical methods; Composite standard sections and their utility in Foraminifera biostratigraphy; New techniques. At this time the organizers welcome additional topics that participants wish to have included.

Field trips are planned through the late Paleozoic accreted terranes of southern British Columbia and to the Mid-Carboniferous boundary succession in southern Nevada.

For further information, contact the organizer: C. A. Ross, Dept. Geology, Western Washington University, MS-9080, Bellingham, WA 98225, USA; Fax: (+360)650-3634; e-mail: rossjrp@henson.cc.wwu.edu

Second International Trilobite Conference

St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

22 - 25 August 1997

Four days of technical sessions will be held at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario. We invite papers on all aspects of trilobite reserach: systematics, biostratigraphy, palaeoecology and evolution. Three field trips will be offered as part of the conference. Pre-meeting trips will deal with the Cambrian sequence of the Canadian Rockies (August 15-21); Leaders: Brian Chatterton and Brian Pratt) and the Cambrian of Maritime Canada (August 12-21; Leaders: Ed Landing and Steve Westrop). The trip to Maritime Canada will double as the Third Field Conference of the Lower Cambrian Stage Subdivision Working Group. A post-meeting trip (August 26-29) led by Kevin Brett and Dave Rudkin will examine the Ordovician and Silurian sequence of southern Ontario. For further details, contact: Steve Westrop, Second International Trilobite Conference, Department of Earth Sciences, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario L2S 3A1, Canada; e-mail: swestrop@spartan.ac.brocku.ca

Second European Meeting on the Palaeontology and Stratigraphy of South America

Heidelberg, Germany
2 - 4 September 1997

(To be held in conjunction with the 18th IAS Regional Meeting on Sedimentology.) Organized by P. Bengtson and H. Bahlburg. Preliminary registration a.s.a.p. Further information incl. registration form is available through the [WWW site](#) or from the organizers: Geologisch-Palaeontologisches Institut, Im Neuenheimer Feld 234, D-69120 Heidelberg, Germany; e-mail: Peter.Bengtson@urz.uni-heidelberg.de or Heinrich.Bahlburg@urz.uni-heidelberg.de

Regional Meeting of IGCP Project 381 "South Atlantic Mesozoic Correlations"

Heidelberg, Germany
2 - 4 September 1997

(To be held in conjunction with the 18th IAS Regional Meeting on Sedimentology.) Organized by P. Bengtson. Preliminary registration a.s.a.p. Further information incl. registration form is available through the [WWW site](#) or from the organizer: Geologisch-Palaeontologisches Institut, Im Neuenheimer Feld 234, D-69120 Heidelberg, Germany; e-mail:

Peter.Bengtson@urz.uni-heidelberg.de

Biotic Recoveries from Mass Extinction, IGCP Project 335

Prague, Czech Republic
12 - 14 September 1997

The final meeting of IGCP Project 335 "Biotic Recoveries from Mass Extinctions" will be held in Prague, Czech Republic. Organized by the Czech Academy of Sciences, the meeting will include three days of scientific meetings plus associated field trips.

Organizers: Petr Cejchan and Jindra Hladil.

For more information check the [recovery website](#)

or contact Petr Cejchan, Geological Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences, Rozojova 135, CZ-16502, Praha 6-Suchbát, Czech Republic

OR Douglas H. Erwin, Dept. of Paleobiology, MRC-121, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560 USA (email: MNHPB028@SIVM.SI.EDU)

OR Erle G. Kaufmann, Dept. of Geological Sciences, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405 USA (email: CLAUDIA@INDIANA.EDU).

Evolution of the Marine Phytoplankton

AASP Annual Meeting and Research Symposium

Woods Hole, Massachusetts, USA
14 - 18 September 1997

In conjunction with the society's annual meeting, the American Association of Stratigraphic Palynologists (AASP) will be sponsoring an extended symposium on the Evolution of the Marine Phytoplankton at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, USA from September 14 through 18, 1997. The aim of the symposium is to bring together the disparate workers in all fields related to the historical analysis of phytoplankton evolution including Palaeoecology, trophic relations in modern and ancient oceans, Systematics, etc. More information is available at the [meeting website](#). Contact Paul K. Strother, Department of Geology & Geophysics, Boston College, Weston Observatory, 381 Concord Road, Weston MA 02193 USA, Ph: + 1 (617) 552-8395; Fax: + 1 (617) 552-8388; Email: strother@hermes.bc.edu

Palaeobiogeography of Australasian Faunas and Floras

University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia
8 - 11 December 1997

The Organizing Committee (Tony Wright, John Talent, Gavin Young) cordially invites all interested scientists to attend this conference and to submit papers for publication and/or oral presentation. The rationale behind the conference is the urgent need for a comprehensive monographic publication summarizing the changing patterns of biogeographic affinities of the Australasian region through geological time.

This meeting will be the only 1997 conference sponsored by the Association of Australasian Palaeontologists, so papers on other palaeontological themes (e.g. evolutionary studies, palaeoecology, precision in biostratigraphy) are welcome. In keeping with the major theme, papers dealing with the biogeography of any group for any geological period are particularly welcomed.

For further information, contact Tony Wright, School of Geosciences, University of Wollongong, Wollongong NSW 2525, Australia. Tel: + 61 42 213 329; Fax + 61 42 214 250; E-mail: t.wright@uow.edu.au

5th International Symposium on the Jurassic System

Vancouver, B.C., Canada
17 - 20 August 1998

Organized by the IUGS Jurassic Subcommittee. There will be pre- and post-meeting field trips to the Canadian Rockies, the Coast Mountains, the Queen Charlotte Islands and Nevada. Contact Paul L. Smith, Earth and Ocean Sciences, University of British Columbia, 6339 Stores Rd., Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z4, Canada. Tel: (604) 822-6456; Fax: (604) 822-6088; e-mail: psmith@eos.ubc.ca
or via the [Symposium Website](#)

[Back to Contents](#)



Newsletter copy

Information, whether copy as such or Newsletter messages, Review material, news, emergencies and advertising suggestions can be sent (preferably on disk) to Dr Sue Rigby, Dept. of Geology and Geophysics,

University of Edinburgh, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JW; e-mail suerigby@glg.ed.ac.uk

It would be helpful if longer items of copy could be sent on a 3 1/2" disk with text in Microsoft Word or Wordperfect. Disks clearly marked with the owner's name and address will be returned as soon as possible.

Deadline for copy for Issue No. 34 is MAY 1 1997 1997.

Palaeontological Association on the Internet

The Palaeontological Association has its own pages on the world-wide web, including information about the Association, and copies of the *Newsletter*. The locator is

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/paleonet/PalAss/PalAss.html>

Site-keeper Mark Purnell can be reached by e-mail on map2@le.ac.uk

Advertising in the Newsletter

Advertising space in the printed paper version of the Newsletter will be made available at the rates given below to any organization or individual provided the content is appropriate to the aims of the Palaeontological Association. Association Members receive a 30% discount on the rates listed.

All copy will be subjected to editorial control. Although every effort will be made to ensure the bona fide nature of advertisements in the Newsletter, the Palaeontological Association cannot accept any responsibility for their content.

£75 for a half page £130 for a full page

These rates are for simple text advertisements printed in the same type face and size as the standard Newsletter text. Other type faces, line drawings, designs etc. can be printed.

Rates for distribution of separate fliers with the Newsletter:

1100 copies for worldwide distribution £230

850 copies for worldwide distribution exclusive of No. America £200

600 copies for U.K. circulation only £150

Reminder:

Deadline for copy for Issue No. 34 is

1 MAY 1997.

[Back to Contents](#)

HTML version of The Newsletter by [Mark Purnell \(map2@le.ac.uk\)](mailto:map2@le.ac.uk)

p2