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Dear Dr Owen,

Hampshire Natural History Museum, Chilcomb

Three years ago, when the Hampshire Cultural Trust was formed, I received a letter from Dr Alan Lovell, Chairman of Trustees, challenging (his word) me to assist in making the Natural History Museum a world-class Institution. I replied, remarking that I had been doing my modest best as a volunteer for the Museum for something like 20 years, and challenging him in turn to provide the facilities for furthering his stated aim. I heard no more.

Having read the Trust's 2015 Strategic Plan, and been informed about the forthcoming rearrangements for administering and caring for the Hampshire museums and art galleries, I am optimistic that some of the facilities at Chilcomb will be improved. At present, access for volunteers and those who wish to consult and work upon the Collections is restricted to Wednesdays. Writing on behalf of the Lepidoptera Collection, on which I have always worked, there is and always has been an immense of work still to be done. Three things in particular stand out:

- a) Accessions have to be quarantined, staged, given accession labels and incorporated in the main Collection.
- b) Specimens from K.G. Blair Collection, which reached Winchester from the Red House Museum, Christchurch in distressingly neglected condition, have been saved and placed in the main Collection. However, Blair had the idiosyncratic method of labelling his material. Until he retired to the Isle of Wight, he labelled his specimens in a sort of code consisting of the number of the specimen collected in a particular year, and that year, e.g. 147/28 meant it was the 147th specimen collected 1928. In themselves, this is meaningless for recording purposes. However, Blair's Diaries are at Chilcomb, and with time and patience, his codes could be traced to the actual locality and date for each specimen, and the relevant data printed and attached to each specimen.
- c) At present, the Lepidoptera Collection is arranged according the Checklist of J.D. Bradley (1998). However. A new Checklist by Agassiz, Beavan and Heckford, incorporating all the changes wrought by the molecular biologists, was published in 2013. If the new management considers it important that the Collection is rearranged in the new sequence, here is another huge task involving time and cabinet space.

I hope very much that the new management will take these problems on board and facilitate their implementation.

However, there are doubts on the minds of myself and colleagues on which I seek reassurance. I have been privileged to read the correspondence between my botanist friends, Tony Mundell and Martin Rand and yourself in regard to the Herbaria, and I feel the same uneasiness. In

the Trust's publicity which I have read, there is no direct reference to the scientific Collections at Chilcomb: it is all about "vibrance", "exciting cultural experiences" which "change lives". This is o.k. for the art galleries and perhaps some of the museums, but it is inappropriate to think in these terms in respect to the Chilcomb Collections. The purpose of these is to provide reference Collections, as complete as possible, for Britain and Hampshire in particular, for consultation and study; to provide a repository for historical and voucher specimens which can be verified and used by recorders and conservationists; to offer a base for workshops on topics such as identification of "difficult" or unfamiliar species, and genitalia dissection technique. Those using these facilities are not there to be excited or to receive life-changing cultural experiences, but for more sober reasons of equal or even greater importance.

We hope that the value of all this is to be recognised and publicised by the Trust, and recognised as a source of pride to Hampshire County. The contribution that the Trust can make is to arrange facilities for more frequent access for volunteers to attack the tasks outlined above; there are often keen but inexperienced volunteers from Southampton University and elsewhere who require help and encouragement from Trust staff or from volunteers who are specialists; the herbaria and invertebrate collections in particular are vulnerable to infestation, and constant vigilance is needed to avoid this; as the collections expand, extra cabinet space is needed; likewise, materials and equipment are required in the arrangement of workshops. When I started as a volunteer, Dr Chris Palmer the senior curator, was always on hand to give help and advice. Is the Trust aware of these situations and their importance, and to provide the necessary backup? I do hope so.

I am now 87 years old, but so long as I last I am willing and eager to help in any way I can. I no longer drive a car, so it is difficult to get to the Museum without help, but if material can be delivered and collected on, say, a weekly basis, I can stage and label accession material at home, for future cataloguing back at the Museum. If I can be helped reach the Museum, I would be delighted to help train students in my specialities (I am a retired schoolmaster).

Yours sincerely,

Barry Goater