Where is the — Collection?

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Abstract: Old soldiers never die, but what of old natural history collections? Even where they have a safe haven in, say, a natural history museum, who knows that they are there? In a highly informative, yet quirky book published 80 years ago, Charles Davies Sherborn (1861–1942) summarised his considerable knowledge of the whereabouts of many notable collections. In so doing, he exposed some of the 'other side' of both the collections and their collectors.

Phillips, John. When P. came to London he put up at 'La belle Sauvage Inn' and in the night the whole of his fossils, which were packed in boxes, were stolen by thieves, who suspected the boxes contained plate. On discovering their error the thieves threw the collection over Blackfriars Bridge into the Thames, where they remain. Some of the invertebrates are at Oxford and some in the Mus. Pract. Geol. (p. 107)

Geologists and other natural historians make collections, describe collections and preserve their collections. They are evidence, deposited in a museum for safe keeping. Future generations will be able to further comment upon 'old' collections as they extend the knowledge base of the natural world and the techniques for studying it. But an important question, asked so often, is just where *is* the material that Dr X described in his 19th-century monograph? Today, if I write a paper describing specimens, it is a rigid convention to say where they are deposited, in which museum or university. But the modern convention has not always been current.

Since my time as a research student, there has been one master reference, *World Palaeontological Collections*, compiled by the late Ron Cleevely (1983). Before then I had assumed that, with some exceptions, it was largely a question of 'do it yourself'. But while researching the British Devonian crinoids with Dr Fiona Fearnhead, I discovered the existence of a whimsical book published after the beginning of the Second World War, *Where is the — Collection?* (Sherborn 1940; Shindler 2016).

My copy (Fig. 1) is stamped 'I.C.S.T. Geology Dept. Library' and Imperial College's deaccession was certainly my gain. *Where is the — Collection?* is A5 size and, I assume, designed to be slipped into the jacket pocket of any curator. There are blank pages for notes regarding entries of personal interest (Fig. 2) and the book is printed on robust paper, ideal for making notes in pencil. It must have been a useful book for many natural historians.

Herein, I have selected a number of entries that I found amusing, attractive or thought-provoking. For example, you will see that the entry for John Phillips, above, indeed embraces all three. Some entries are included because I have an interest in the subject, such as Charles Dawson and Piltdown Man, but many were previously unknown to me, such as the Cirencester Agricultural College. I have retained the original prose and punctuation, even where it is grotesquely wrong. The abbreviation 'B.M.' stands mainly for British Museum (Natural History), but may be British Museum in some examples.

Anning, Mary. Her coll. was sold, see H.R. Brown, *Beauties of Lyme*, 1860, 28. The bros. Marder had some of her specimens. (p. 9)

Ashmole, Elias. His colls. destroyed by a fire in The Temple, London. (p. 9)

Austin, Thos. & Thos. Crinoid Coll. in Liverpool Mus. See Bather, *Ann. Mag. N.H.* Feb. 1914, for the way this local museum has treated Austin's types. (p. 11)

Bligh (Mrs). Wife of Wm. Bligh, Adm. of the 'Bounty', was Elizabeth Betham and was buried in Lambeth Churchyard next to Tradescant. Died 1812. Swainson catalogued her shells. See [*Notes and Queries*] (11) XII. 1915, 396. (p. 19)

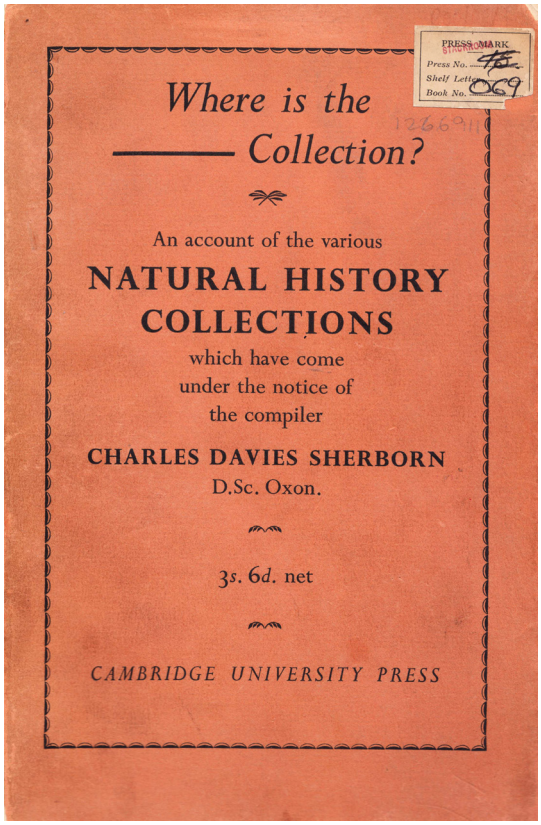

***Figure 1**. Front cover of Sherborn's* Where is the — Collection? *(present author's copy)*

Brassey (Sunbeam Coll.). In Park Lane, London, then Battle, then Robertsbridge and now (1932) in New Town Mus. Hastings. (p. 23)

Browning, W.B. Coll. of Jarrow Labyrinthodonts descr. by Huxley & Wright. Partly burned by Sinn Fein in July 1920. (p. 25)

Buckland, William. …His famous hammer stolen from B.M. in 1928… (p. 27)

Calvert, John. There were two J.C.'s, one a silver miner of Vasi Rupi. The other was a mining engineer whose life was published in *The Mining Journal* about 1905. He was an unscrupulous blackguard. He seduced two of the Sowerby girls … He was in London in 1905 scheming to involve H.P. Woodward in some rotten mining plans but a cable to Westralia frustrated him… [Part of his collection] was acquired later, I believe by H.E.H. Smedley for Tottenham Castle Mus… (p. 29)

Cirencester Agric. College. Included Jas. Buckman's fossils. During the war of 1914-18 premises seized by War Office and collection thrown into coal cellar. Swinnerton rescued the Ammonites and Reynolds some other stuff. Type Ammonites promised to B.M. (p. 33)

Corfu Public Library. In ruinous state, 1934. (p. 37)

Curiosity House, City Road, London. 1795, see *Gent. Mag.* 1796, 467. Used a metal pass with Kangoorou, Armadillo and Rhinoceros on obverse (an early figure of a Kangaroo) (p. 41)

Dawson, Chas. Sussex Rept. and Iguanodons; Piltdown skull, in B.M. (p. 43)

Du Chaillu, P.B. Sale, [*The Athenæum*] June 1863, 731. The piece of skin he tore off the first Gorilla he shot is in the B.M. (p. 47)

Elgin Museum. See *Nature*, Sept. 1871, 436. In 1936 said to be a dump of useful stuff uncared for. (p. 49)

Fischer de W., G. in Moscow, much destroyed in the fire, 1812. (p. 51)

Giggleswick Grammar School. Has the Victoria Cave remains. (p. 57)

Grant, R.E. No types known; specimens probably thrown away after examination. (p. 59)

Greenhill,—. Flint implements are in Hackney Public Liby… (p. 61)

Greenough, G.B. MSS. saved from burning by Sinn Fein, 1920… (p. 61)

Griffith, Sir Rich. …many [what?] … bequeathed to Miss Bowen-Coulthurst, whose house was burned by Sinn Fein in 1920… (p. 61)

Groom, Chas. Otley. Became successively Groom-Napier, Duke of Mantua and Monteferrat, Prince of Mantua, Prince of the House of David. Claimed to be a 'Palaeologos'. Warned off the B.M., said to be dead many times, law case before Sir Geo. Jessel. Sold false nuggets to Ruskin. Had no types. Founded Mantuan Gold medal of which Owen's specimen is in the B.M. (N.H.)… Was a notorious rogue and thief, tried to kill Thomas Davies by dropping a boulder upon him from a high ladder in Tennant's shop in the Strand. (pp. 61, 63)

Guppy, H.B.L. Fossil shells sold to Washington. All the rest of his colls. burnt in Victoria Inst., Trinidad, in 1920. (p. 63)

Hennah, Rich. Corals in Geol. Soc. Lond. were lent to W. Lonsdale and most returned to the Soc. and placed 'in a heap' in a drawer on top floor. A few types identified in 1934 and now in B.M. (p. 67)

Hopkinson, John. In St Albans Mus., unpacked in 1931. (p. 71)

Hume, W.F. Irish Cret. Had no coll., but depended on local men. Afterwards Egyptian Geol. Surv. (p. 73)

Hunter, J.R.S. (of Braidwood). Much was destroyed in the fire at the Dick Inst. Kilmarnock. (p. 73)

Johnson, Henry (of Dudley, 'Dynamite Johnson'). See *Geol. Mag.* Aug. 1913, Wrapper. (p. 75)

Kenworthy,—. Had monkey skull from Roman remains, but present whereabouts unknown, (p. 79)

Laporte, F.L. de (Count de Castelnau). At Louvain, a few fishes borrowed by G.A. Boulenger are safe in the B.M., rest destroyed by the Germans… (p. 81)

Lear, Edw. F.W. Millett of Marazion had his drawings of Tortoises in 1910. Hodgson was selling drawings of Parrots in Jan. 1929. Drawings of Gould's Mamm. of Australia and Bell's Brit. Quadr. in hands of exors. of F.W. Millett at Brixham in 1915. (p. 83)

Lyell, Sir Chas. Types remained at Kinnordy. A fossil fish type had been blackleaded and used as a doorstep but is now cleaned and in the B.M. (p. 89)

McChesney, J.H. Destroyed by fire in Chicago Acad. Sci. 1865, but some plastotypes in Walker Mus. Chicago and some in Nat. Mus. Washington… (p. 89)

Millar (Dr, of Bethnal Green). Interested in microscope and worked on Foraminifera. Published nothing. Coll. scattered, some in B.M. Sale, [*The Athenaeum*]. Ap. 1888, 488. (p. 95)

Millett, F.W. Liby. bought by Heron-Allen, 1915. Foram. drawings left to Joseph Wright, Edward Lear drawings retained by exors. He kept his rare books in the W.C. under the seat. (p. 97)

Newton, Edwin Tulley. All skeletons bought by B.M.; his ten cabinets and all pamphlets bought by Sherborn and distributed; Coal slides in B.M., also Rabbit skull; Cockroach brain in Roy. Coll. Surg. (p. 101)

Parker, James. Oxford Mus. 1913. Sollas destroyed the *Phascolotherium* jaw in 1919. (p. 105)

Quenstedt, F.A. von. At Tübingen, but in a muddle, 1935. (p. 111)

Rheims Museum. Destroyed by the Germans in 1916. Lemoine and Melville cols. gone. (p. 113)

Reynell, Alex. Fell dead, Fetter Lane, Dec. 1938. Salisbury had most of his shells; Tomlin his books. (p. 113)

Rickman, C. (of Dulwich). Later on collected at Barton and sold fossils under name of R. Charles. (p. 113)

Rowley, R.R. Died Jan. 1935; 'coll. will shortly be on sale'. (p. 115)

Sherborn, Chas. Davies. All geol. specimens passed at once into B.M. Books, coins, MSS. and antiq. all selected by B.M. Prints, Univ. London. Byzantine coins to Fitzwilliam. Foraminiferal liby. sold to R. L. Sherlock. (p. 121)

Simmons, Jeremiah. 'Bromley Chalk fossils.' They came from Chislehurst caves. In B.M. See Dibley, *Geol. Mag*. 1911, 96. The *Ichthyosaurus* is merely a mass of flint. (p. 123)

Stebbing, T.R.R. In B.M., most of the spirit had evaporated and specimens were practically useless. (p. 127)

Valparaiso Museum. Delphin types destroyed by earthquake and fire. (p. 135)

Volta, G.S. Foss. fishes. In Paris, stolen by Napoleon. (p. 137)

Watson, White. Coll. (which formed a rockery) bought by B.M. 1914, barrelled up and sent to London. A few figured specimens found which had belonged to Wm. Martin… (p. 141)

Weaver, Thos. Coll. was used to form hard core of a urinal at Bewdley… (p. 141)

Weeks,— (formerly Cox). Had the mechanical spider. See [*Notes & Queries*] (9) IX, 97. Sale [*The Athenæum*] 1834, 510. See Cox, James. (p. 141)

Westlake, Ernest. Killed in Holborn, 1922. Geol.; had Caleb Evans Coll. (p. 141)

References

Cleevely, R. J. 1983. *World Palaeontological Collections*. London: British Museum (Natural History) and Mansell Publishing.

Sherborn, C. D. 1940. *Where is the — Collection? An account of the various Natural History Collections which have come under the notice of the compiler CHARLES DAVIES SHERBORN D.Sc. Oxon. between 1880 and 1939*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Shindler, K. 2016. A magpie with a card-index mind – Charles Davies Sherborn 1861–1942. *ZooKeys*, **550**, 33–56. doi: 10.3897/zookeys.550.9975.

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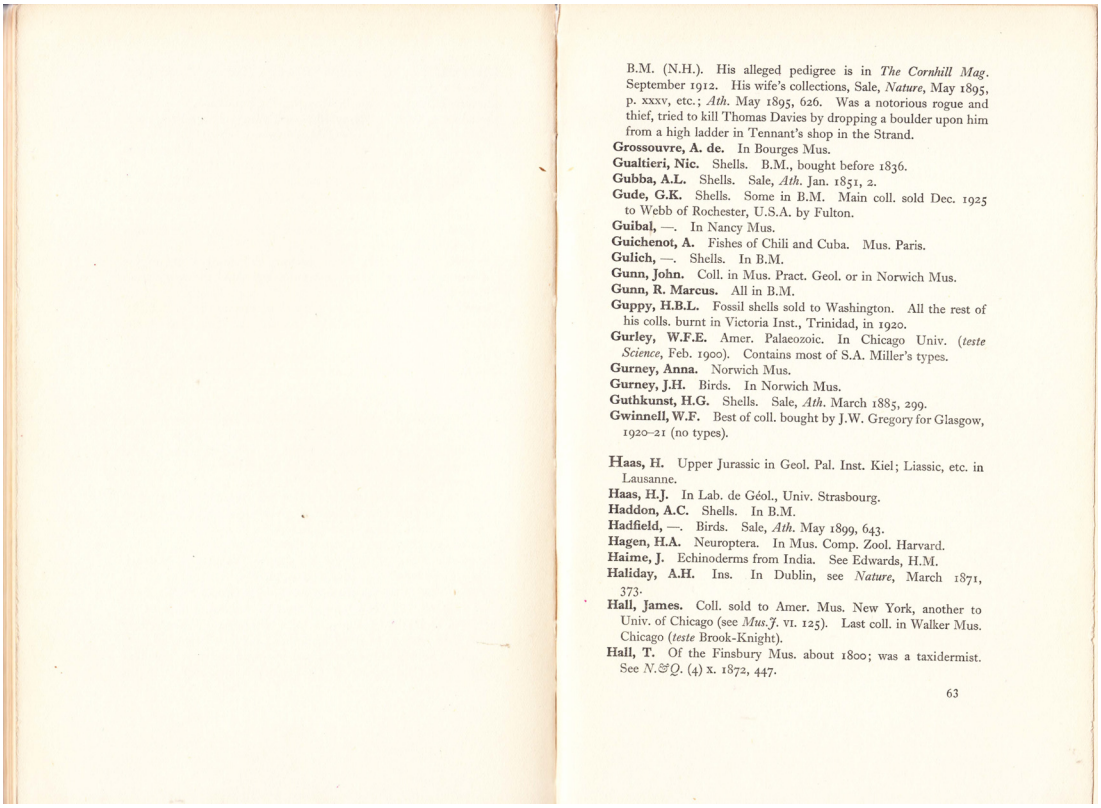

B.M. (N.H.). His alleged pedigree is in *The Cornhill Mag*. September 1912. His wife's collections, Sale, *Nature*, May 1895, p. xxxv, etc.; *Ath*. May 1895, 626. Was a notorious rogue and thief, tried to kill Thomas Davies by dropping a boulder upon him from a high ladder in Tennant's shop in the Strand.

Grossouvre, A. de. In Bourges Mus.

Gualtieri, Nic. Shells. B.M., bought before 1836.

Gubba, A.L. Shells. Sale, *Ath*. Jan. 1851, 2.

Gude, G.K. Shells. Some in B.M. Main coll. sold Dec. 1925 to Webb of Rochester, U.S.A. by Fulton.

Guibal, —. In Nancy Mus.

Guichenot, A. Fishes of Chili and Cuba. Mus. Paris.

Gulich, —. Shells. In B.M.

Gunn, John. Coll. in Mus. Pract. Geol. or in Norwich Mus.

Gunn, R. Marcus. All in B.M.

Guppy, H.B.L. Fossil shells sold to Washington. All the rest of his colls. burnt in Victoria Inst., Trinidad, in 1920.

Gurley, W.F.E. Amer. Palaeozoic. In Chicago Univ. (*teste Science*, Feb. 1900). Contains most of S.A. Miller's types.

Gurney, Anna. Norwich Mus.

Gurney, J.H. Birds. In Norwich Mus.

Guthkunst, H.G. Shells. Sale, *Ath*. March 1885, 299.

Gwinnell, W.F. Best of coll. bought by J.W. Gregory for Glasgow, 1920–21 (no types).

Haas, H. Upper Jurassic in Geol. Pal. Inst. Kiel; Liassic, etc. in Lausanne.

Haas, H.J. In Lab. de Géol., Univ. Strasbourg.

Haddon, A.C. Shells. In B.M.

Hadfield, —. Birds. Sale, *Ath*. May 1899, 643.

Hagen, H.A. Neuroptera. In Mus. Comp. Zool. Harvard.

Haime, J. Echinoderms from India. See Edwards, H.M.

Haliday, A.H. Ins. In Dublin, see *Nature*, March 1871, 373.

Hall, James. Coll. sold to Amer. Mus. New York, another to Univ. of Chicago (see *Mus.J.* VI. 125). Last coll. in Walker Mus. Chicago (*teste* Brook-Knight).

Hall, T. Of the Finsbury Mus. about 1800; was a taxidermist. See *N.&Q.* (4) X. 1872, 447.

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***Figure 2**. Pages 62 and 63 of* Where is the — Collection? *The left hand pages of the catalogue are all blank, allowing the reader to make annotations as and where required.*