After many requests from members to trial a new venue for PSG meetings, we had a PSG “Northern” meeting on Saturday, 17th November 2007, at the Manchester Museum, England. The event was called “Phasmid Day”. The whole meeting was open to all PSG, Phasma, and Stick Talk members, and just the talks and displays were open to the public.

The meeting was principally arranged by Yvonne Golding, Cameron DK, and Dmitri Logunov (Curator of Arthropods at the Manchester Museum), as well as myself. As this was a new event, and the organisers lived all over the country, it was no mean task to make the arrangements in the fairly short period of time; but after much hard work, and stacks of e-mails, we had put together a very ambitious meeting, which we were all looking forward to attending. In fact, as it turned out, the public display side of things at least was so successful we were rushed off our feet. Therefore, many thanks to all our helpers, including Moira Drennan, Mike Hill, Sarah Houghton, Phil Rispin, Phil Bragg, and Cameron’s friend Rob.

Cameron and Yvonne had begun setting things up the day before the meeting. I could not get there that early – indeed I arrived at Yvonne’s house after midnight. (And my thanks go to Yvonne and her husband Roland for putting me up.) I arrived at the museum with Yvonne just after 9am Saturday; Cameron, Sarah, Dmitri, and a few others, were already there and busy working on the arrangements. I was quite impressed with the venue and its facilities, and pleasantly surprised with the amazing display Cameron had masterminded.

We all worked our socks off making the final arrangements before the start time. The layout consisted firstly of our main display area which was accessed by a doorway, open to the public, from the main museum. (In fact there was a “Volcano Day” on at the museum that day, and visitors to and from that display had to pass this doorway. So we also had a cage of “enticing” *Eurycantha* at this entrance to catch the attention of passers-by). The visitors were greeted, introduced to the display, advised of the talks and the competition, and invited to walk round. Cameron did this, almost single-handedly, all day. What a star – though I could tell he was thoroughly enjoying it. The display consisted of camouflage netting, lots of plants, information notices, stacks of stick insects, and careful backlighting. It was impressive.

The public had to walk round it in one direction. Firstly they saw lots of notices explaining all sorts of things about stick insects, there was an adult and children’s competition, and then there was an assortment of stick insects, each with an information label. Next was a “jungle” of plants with stick insects “hidden” in them, where people were invited to “find the stick insect”. Finally,
there was an opportunity to hold a stick insect - which was very popular, and certainly kept Sarah Houghton and a troupe of stick insects very busy all day.

What proved very popular with the children, and even many adults, were the sticky labels I had made up – one saying “I've seen Stick Insects”, the other saying “I've held a Stick Insect”. We gave scores of them away, so these must have been seen all over Manchester as the people left the museum.

After this display there was a short passageway to the lecture theatre. In this passageway, on behalf of Phasma, Moira Drennan had set up an excellent stall with lots of interesting stick insect related items on show and/or for sale - including freebie sweets and key rings.

In the lecture hall we had a further display of stick insects and, of course, the talks; and for the PSG etc membership, we also had displays of dead specimens, books, a “PSG” table with the name badges, a quiz, agendas, etc on, and of course the livestock exchange table. But many of the public found this area very interesting too, though not a high percentage ventured that far.

Finally there was yet another room, just off the short passageway, that led to our refreshment room, with tea, coffee, biscuits, etc, available all day to members and helpers (but not the public). This was kindly provided by the museum thanks to Yvonne and Dmitri.

No organiser had spare time to do much more than their chosen duties. (We had hoped more PSG members would have been there to take on some relief duties, but only 13 PSG members turned out – including the helpers. Though to be fair, not many PSG members lived “up north”, and the meeting was arranged at fairly short notice). We would have had more help from the museum’s “volunteer helpers”, but of course they were busy assisting at the Volcano display). Indeed, after a very short quiet period when we first opened, we were inundated with a very steady flow of public visitors all day, and, so far as I am aware, none of the helpers had time to look round any part of the museum, let alone go on the museum tour, or watch all the talks – we did not even manage to eat anything for lunch until after 4pm. We could of course have left our posts, it was voluntary after all, but in fact we were enjoying ourselves. Anyway, I’m sure most PSG stallholders at various shows work just as hard – it goes with the territory.

We delayed the talks to allow more people to take their seats, but even so, when we did start the talks, they were initially very sparsely attended. The first talk had only about 10 people attend. The number increased as the day went on, and the last talk had an audience of well over 20. We had hoped for even more overall, but this was still good. This part of the proceedings was intended mainly for PSG etc members of course, but very few were able to attend.
I saw only a few minutes of Dmitri’s “Welcome” and interesting talk on “A Treasure Chamber of Bugs”. The bit I saw was when he was explaining about the insects the museum held, and he said it included thousands of specimens including numerous private collections. This was followed shortly afterwards by Yvonne’s excellent talk on “Insects and the Art of Deception”. Again, I saw only a few minutes of this talk, but it was amazingly good (eg how some insects mimic ants or bees, and even fool the ants and bees into thinking that’s what they are, and there were superb pictures that demonstrated all this). Sadly, I missed altogether Phil’s talk on “Naming Phasmids”, though it is a subject I’m sure we are all very interested in.

I managed to catch all of Moira’s brilliant short talk on “Keeping and Rearing Phasmids”. Moira had pitched her short talk at just the right level to suit either a complete novice, or a partly experienced phasmid keeper - it was a perfect talk for this sort of event. Ed Baker was unable to attend to give his talk on “Introducing the New PSG Website”, so the last talk was Phil’s on “Phasmid Hunting in Borneo”, which sadly again I saw none of, but I believe it was very similar to the very good talk he gave at our Summer PSG meeting.

The adult, and especially children’s, public quizzes were very popular (eg over 150 children took part), and each was hoping for the prize of a free cage of stick insects. Those that had turned up for the results, and were not successful at the competition, were offered a free pair of *Aretaon asperrimus*, together with a care sheet. Lots of people also expressed a wish to join the PSG and each took away an application form [I believe we gained around 6 new PSG members in the end; excellent for this type of event.]

PSG member Geoff Garratt brought in some PSG 82 nymphs, *Rhaphiderus spinigerus*. I did not know this species, but he said they were easy to keep and very beautiful. A few of us shared them out between us. He was quite right – very easy to keep, very nice to look at, and very photogenic (eg my photo of one came 2nd in the PSG Winter Meeting’s Photographic Competition).

At the end of the day, we cleared up and went off to Manchester’s “curry mile”, for a curry in an Indian restaurant. It was good to relax over a slow meal with friends, to discuss how things had gone during the day – and watch literally hundreds of busses pass by! My journey home was interesting too, firstly through thick snow, then through driving rain and, strangely, as I passed Newport Pagnel on the M1 motorway, I suddenly drove out of the driving rain and found the roads were then completely dry. Who says there is no north/south divide?

Overall, the day was very successful, and we plan to hold another meeting there on 8th November 2008. Please mark this in your diaries and try to attend. We will take into account what went well and what we need to improve upon, and hope to make the next meeting even better than this one, with maybe a few more PSG attendees.

I’d like to thank all the main organisers of the day who kindly read through this article and offered their constructive comments. If anyone has any ideas, requests, offers, or wants to do a talk, on this or any other PSG meeting, please let me know mikel smith@tinyworld.co.uk.