

News release



6 March 2015

Oxford University Museum of Natural History treasure moves online in first citizen science project

One of the greatest archival treasures of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History is the subject of the Museum's first citizen science website – *Jones' Icones Online* (www.jonesicones.com). Featuring the beautiful 18th-century paintings by William Jones, the website will make his scientifically and historically important work available to all for the first time.

The six-volume manuscript, now popularly known as *Jones' Icones*, contains remarkably accurate images of more than 750 moth and butterfly species. In addition to making these beautiful images available online for the first time, the site will allow people around the world to help identify all the species painted in the work.

The project was inspired by the Museum's collection of William Jones of Chelsea (1745-1818), of which the *Icones* is the most famous. In recognition of its importance as a key text in the history of British Lepidoptera – the study of butterflies and moths – Museum Head of Archives and Library, Kate Santry, set up the project as a “way to ensure that a manuscript as beautiful and important as this could be seen by more than a handful of people each year,” as it has been until now.



As well as being a work of art, *Jones' Icones* is also an extraordinarily significant document in the history of entomology and insect-collecting in Britain; some images in the *Icones* remain the only known visual representations of the specimens described. Kate Santry explains:

“At the time that Jones was making these paintings, many of the specimens he was depicting were being brought to Europe and described for the first time, most notably from Australia

and the Oceanic region. Jones meticulously recorded these specimens through his paintings, and his work remains the only record of many of these important collections, a large number long-since destroyed, lost or divided amongst private collectors.”

To participate in the citizen science component of the project users may register on the website and indicate their level of expertise in butterfly and moth identification. This will allow the Museum to track the identifications, and take note of those made by experts, as well as recognise the expertise of keen amateurs. The website also hopes to generate interaction between experts and amateurs by encouraging discussion around the identifications.

The project was generously funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund’s *Your Heritage* initiative. This funding supported the Museum in digitising this original and one-of-a-kind manuscript, cataloguing the archive and specimen collections, and in developing the website and online application. It also supported a number of public engagement events, including a lecture and exhibition, and a volunteer programme.

For further information:

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Notes to editors

- **About William Jones of Chelsea (1745-1818) and Jones’ *Icones***
William Jones was a highly regarded, but relatively unknown amateur British naturalist in the late Eighteenth Century. A London wine merchant by trade, he became most famous for his work on Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) which are highlighted in his collections at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and include a small archive of papers, a large sample of butterfly and moth specimens, and a magnificent, six-volume manuscript featuring stunningly detailed paintings of butterflies and moths –Jones’ *Icones*.

The manuscript has influenced the taxonomy of Lepidoptera. In 1787, Johann Christian Fabricius (1745-1808), a Danish student of Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) and the man credited with establishing the modern basis for insect classification, studied the Jones’ *Icones* while in England and subsequently named over 200 species of butterflies and moths based on its paintings. Many of these names were published in *Entomologia Systematica* (1793) and the *Icones* remains the only known visual representation of many of the specimens described.

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- **About the Museum Library and Archive**

The Museum Library and Archive houses a unique collection of natural history books, journals and archives, with a focus on subjects relating to the Museum's collections and research. The Library contains over 19,000 volumes, including a number of rare and antiquarian books, and over 100 current periodicals titles. The Archive holds a wide range of papers, photographs and maps relating to the Museum's specimen collections, and several archives from some of the most notable naturalists in English history, including William Smith, William Buckland, John Phillips and J.O. Westwood. The Library and Archive at Oxford University Museum of Natural History is open to all interested researchers and students.

- Founded in 1860 as the centre for scientific study at the University of Oxford, the Museum of Natural History now holds the University's internationally significant collections of entomological, geological and zoological specimens. Housed in a stunning example of neo-Gothic architecture, the Museum's growing collections underpin a broad programme of natural environment research, teaching and public engagement.

- **About the Heritage Lottery Fund**

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. For museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environments and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported over 30,000 projects, allocation £4.6 billion across the UK. www.hlf.org.uk