REPORT

The Geological Collections of the Natural History Museum, Wollaton Hall, Nottingham

History of the Museum

The first public natural history museum in Nottingham was established in 1867 in rooms at 25 Wheeler Gate. It consisted of "a collection of natural history, botanical, geological and other specimens, mineralogy, antiquities and general curiosities made by Nottingham Naturalists Society (now defunct), the Committee of the Mechanics Institution and the trustees of the late Mr George Walker" (Jones, 1934). The Museum first opened to the public on the 16th April, 1872. With the growth in size and importance of the collections came the need for bigger and better accommodation, so in 1881 the Museum was moved to a specially-built west wing of the University College building in Shakespeare Street/ Bilbie Street. It was placed under the charge of the Professor of Biology, J. W. Carr, who was also responsible for the Department of Geology.

In 1925, Wollaton Hall and the surrounding park were bought by Nottingham Corporation from Lord Middleton, and a year later the Museum's collections were transferred there. Sir Francis Willoughby (1547-1596) used some of his inherited wealth to build Wollaton Hall in 1588. It remains one of the finest Elizabethan mansions in the country. In 1927 the administration of the Natural History Museum passed from the University to Nottingham Corporation, and Professor Carr was appointed curator.

The Geological Collections

Since the establishment of the Museum in 1867, the geological collections have been added to continuously, with some large and many small donations and purchases. The collections currently number around 45,000 specimens, comprising approximately 40,000 fossils, 4,000 minerals and 1,000 rocks.

The Fossil Collections

Fossil collections have been built up over the years by Museum staff and through important donations. One of the first to be acquired was the Samuel Carrington collection, in 1870. Samuel Carrington (1798-1870) lived at Wetton, near Leek, Staffordshire, and made an important collection of Lower Carboniferous fossils from the North Derbyshire and East Staffordshire areas (Zoeteweij, 1986).

Fig. 1. Wollaton Hall

The next major acquisition, in 1876, was a collection of Pleistocene mammal remains from the Cresswell Crags caves made by the Reverend John Magens Mello (1836-1914), who was Rector at Brampton, Chesterfield. He was intrigued by the archaeological potential of the caves, and in 1875-76 was involved in the exploration and excavations there, along with Thomas Heath, Curator of the Derby Museum, and William Boyd Dawkins, Curator of the Museum at the Victoria University of Manchester (Jenkinson and Gilbertson, 1984). Recent research on the collection by Dr Roger Jacobi of the Archaeology Department, University of Nottingham, has revealed that some of the mammal specimens in the collection were photographed and illustrated by Mello (1891) in a book on the geology of Derbyshire.

In the 1870s, the Museum also received an important collection of Wenlock Limestone fossils made by Mr E. J. Hollier, who lived at Dudley in the West Midlands and was a chemist and a former Mayor of the town. He was also a Joint Hon. Secretary of the Dudley and Midland Geological and Scientific Society and Field Club in 1862-63 (Cutler, 1981). His collection includes many fine invertebrate fossils including several specimens of the trilobite *Calymene blumenbachii* (Brongniart), which has become widely known as "The Dudley Locust".

Collections acquired this century include British fossils collected by the Reverend T. C. B. Chamberlin of East Retford, Nottinghamshire, and donated in 1911, and, in the 1930s, Upper Carboniferous plant fossils from the Derbyshire coalfield collected by A. R. Horwood (1879-1937), several of which are figured specimens. In 1972, a collection of Permo-Triassic footprints made by Prof. H. H. Swinnerton from the Mapperley area of Nottingham and described by Prof. W. A. S. Sarjeant was transferred from Nottingham University to the Museum (Sarjeant, 1983). In 1989, the Museum added to its footprint collection the footprint of a mammal-like reptile from the Upper Permian Cadeby Formation of Gregory Quarry, Mansfield. This specimen now forms part of the new fossil display at the Museum.

The Mineral and Rock Collections

Since the 1880s, the Museum has purchased minerals and rocks from dealers, including Friedrick Krantz, Gregory, Bottley and Co. and Robert Damon. This century, the Museum has acquired three major collections. In 1911, a mineral collection made by Mr G. T. Davy in the latter half of the 19th century was donated, consisting mainly of specimens from Chile and Peru, where he had once lived. The next major donation, in 1926, was the collection of Frederick Gillman (1845-1925), a mining engineer of Anglo-Swiss parentage. He was born in London and studied mining engineering at Freiburg, Saxony, after which he was involved in the management of silver mining operations near Granada, Spain, which were controlled by his father, Robert. Rocks and minerals from the silver and lead mines of southern Spain form the majority of the collection.

In 1954, the Henry Crowther (1848-1937) collection was donated to the Museum. Henry Crowther's interests covered a wide range of subjects, including molluscs and geology, particularly related to mining. He was Curator of Leeds City Museum on two separate occasions, with a period in between as lecturer in geology and mineralogy at the School of Mines in Camborne, Cornwall. His collection consists mainly of Cornish minerals.

Displays and Services

On 15th June, 1991, a new fossil gallery called "The Fossil Story" opened at the Museum. The gallery explains what fossils are, followed by seven reconstructed landscapes showing scenes from life on Earth during the last 430 million years. Part of the mineral collection is on display in the Minerals Gallery. This first opened in 1982 and houses a wide range of specimens. In one half there is a systematic arrangement of minerals based on their chemical composition and in the other is an aesthetic display of larger specimens.

In addition to the display material, the geological reference collections are available for inspection by the public by appointment. The Museum is also the record centre for Nottinghamshire in the National Scheme for Geological Site Documentation. The role of the Museum is to inspire, please and educate people about geology and natural history. We hope to continue to do so for many years to come.

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