

## REPORT

### Nottingham Natural History Museum, recent developments at Wollaton Hall

At Easter, 2007, Wollaton Hall reopened for visitors every day of the week, following 18 months of restoration and refurbishing work, costing around £9M. As well as extensive repairs to the building's stonework, the Prospect Room above the Great Hall was completely restored, a new café was created in the Courtyard Buildings and a lift, new toilets and new displays were installed in Wollaton Hall. Some of the new displays were about the history of Wollaton Hall and the people who have lived there over the years and others were about the natural history collections. The latter group included a new display in the Bird Room and a new display on the first floor called Natural Connections.

A wide variety of fossils and taxidermically prepared animals are on display in Natural Connections. The fossils range from crinoids, trilobites and corals from the mid-Silurian through to a giant deer's skull and antlers on open display and bones and teeth of mammals like wolves, bears, hyena and woolly rhinoceros from the Pleistocene deposits in the caves at Creswell Crags and other Nottinghamshire localities. There is also a pallasite meteorite and a small number of rocks, minerals and pressed plants.

However, you can still see the best of the museum's mineral collections in the Minerals Gallery, also on the first floor of the museum in Wollaton Hall. The main theme behind Natural Connections is an illustration of the wide variety of life that exists on Earth today and also did so within the geological past. Many of the fossils are brought to life with an artist's reconstruction of what the animal or plant might have looked like when it was alive.

Another theme is a selection of people's choices of particular animals or fossils, rocks or minerals on display with an explanation of what connection they have with their chosen object through a video and a label. For example, the writer's personal choice is of a seed-fern frond fossil, *Mariopteris* sp., that was found in Hucknall Colliery, Nottinghamshire. It was chosen, not only because it is undeniably attractive, but also because it represents the museum's very strong collection of Coal Measures plant fossils from the Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire coalfield, which include some scientifically important fossils collected from collieries that have long since closed. Other people's choices include a part of a fossil tree discovered by Tony Waltham and his students when the A610 Eastwood by-pass was being built, a Cambrian trilobite (*Hydrocephalus* sp.) from the Czech Republic chosen by Bob Kennedy a trilobite researcher, and a *Chirotherium* footprint found in the Mapperley area of Nottingham and chosen by a local student.



*The fossil frond of Mariopteris from Hucknall Colliery.*

This February, to mark the bi-centenary of Charles Darwin's birth, some animals were newly restored by our taxidermists, including a maned three-toed sloth, a giant anteater and a duck-billed platypus. These have been added to the Natural Connections display, and tours of the gallery were given to highlight certain fossils, rocks, minerals and animals on display that had connections with Darwin's life and works.

Other areas of current work include updating the details of, and answering enquiries about, the Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) in Nottinghamshire and co-operation with others in the local RIGS group to help conserve and promote the County's important geology sites. The databases of the museum's geology collections, and the care of the collections, are being constantly improved. The museum has a free public enquiry service, and attempts to answer any queries about geological specimens. Recent calls have been about fluorite specimens from Crich in Derbyshire.

The Nottingham Natural History Museum is open from 11am to 5pm from April to October (last entry 4.30pm) and from 11am to 4pm from November to March (last entry 3.30pm). Entry to the Museum and to Wollaton Hall is free. The museum can be viewed on the Nottingham City Council website: <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk> (click on *leisure and culture* then *museums and galleries* and under *Wollaton Hall, gardens and deer park* select *Natural History Museum*). Geological enquiries can be sent to [neilt@ncmg.org.uk](mailto:neilt@ncmg.org.uk) or made by phone at 0115 915 3907 or 3900.

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