

DEVON & EXETER INSTITUTION

COLLECTING THE WORLD

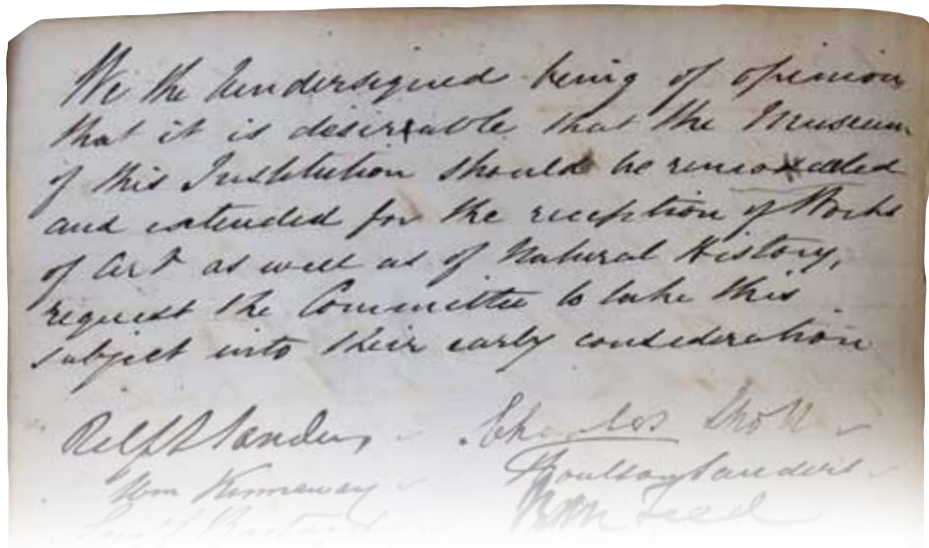
THE INSTITUTION MUSEUM AND THE ORIGINS OF RAMM

The Devon and Exeter Institution was founded in 1813 at a time of voyages of discovery and a growing interest in natural history.

An 1861 entry into the members' comments book suggests that the 'Institution Museum' was extending beyond the capacity of the building.

It reads 'We the undersigned being of opinion that it is desirable that the Museum of this Institution should be remodelled and extended for the reception of Works of Art as well as of Natural History, request the Committee to take this subject into their early consideration'.

Excerpt from Institution's members' comments book, 1861.



As well as books it built up a miscellaneous but highly significant collection of specimens of natural history, ethnography and antiquities, reflecting the distinguished members' roles both as explorers in the Arctic and the Pacific and as representatives of Empire in professions such as naval officers, soldiers, colonial officials, missionaries and traders.

This early enthusiasm for the museum waned leading to George T Donnithorpe, editor of the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette suggesting it had "slumbered into quiet forgetfulness" and for members to start a comments Book; the first issue being "the remodelling of the museum".

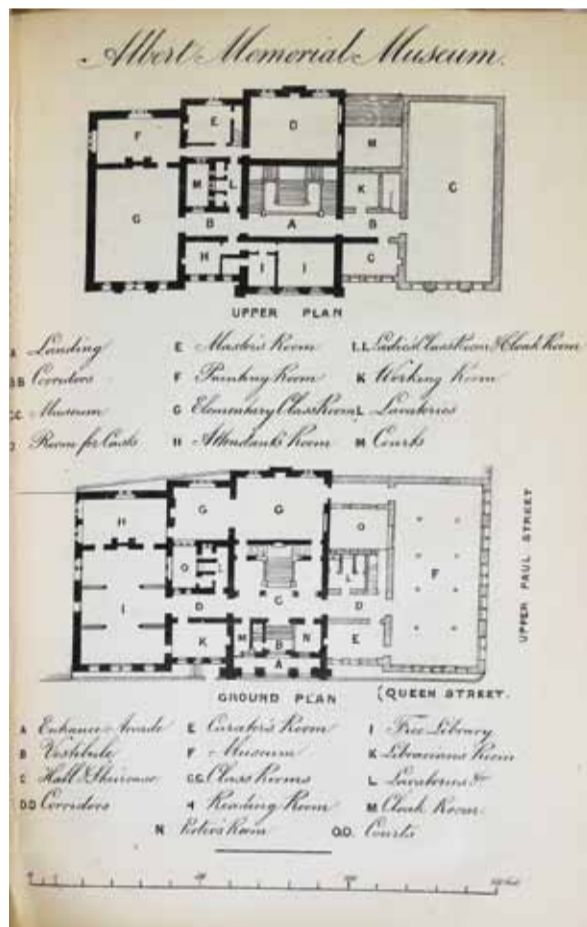


An early photograph of the Inner Library which once housed the Institution Museum.

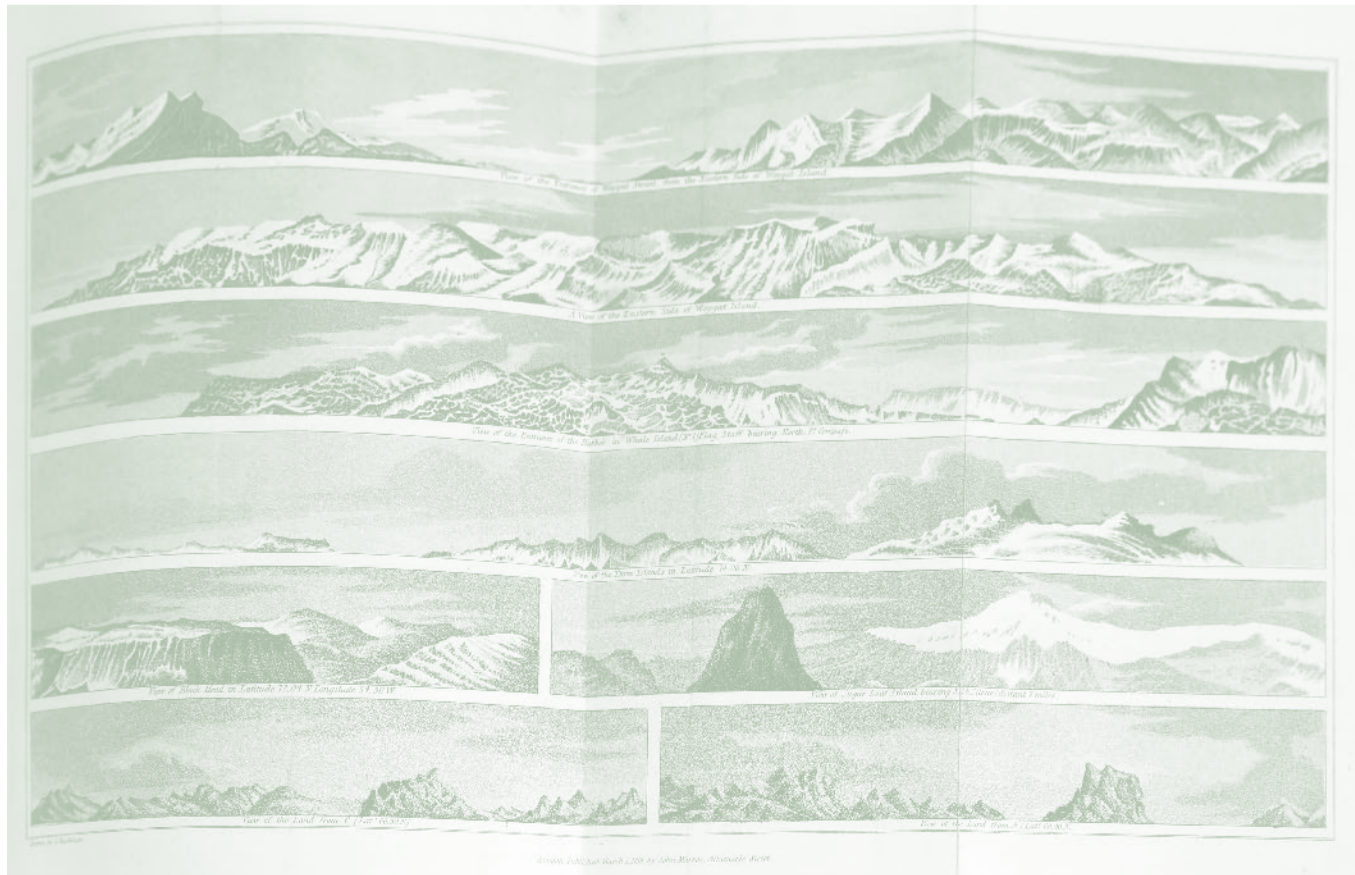


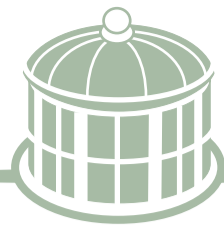
'Voyage of Discovery' illustrations above and below from a collection of texts on early exploration of the Arctic by Institution members.

The contents of the Institution Museum transferred to the new Albert Memorial Museum in 1868. The transfer was later augmented with a further collection of items in 1871 and 1872, including most importantly the Pacific collection of Captain F.G. Bond. The last recorded transfer was a fine donation of seaweed specimens collected by Mrs Griffiths in 1931.



An early floor plan showing the layout of the new Albert Memorial Museum.





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The Royal Albert Memorial Museum was founded in 1865 as the Albert Memorial Museum and opened in 1868.

Most of its founding collections were within the field of natural history and ethnography and many of the items which came from the Devon and Exeter Institution form part of the important World Cultures Collections, designated as of national and International Importance in 1998.

We believe that most of the Institution's taxidermy collection was already too damaged by infestation to be transferred, although many minerals, skulls, shells and fossils were deaccessioned and can be found at RAMM today.

Of the 3000 objects and specimens displayed at the Institution Museum some 2500 have current object records. Several of the most remarkable items are still displayed and enjoyed by visitors today.



An early 20th Century view of the Zoological Room at RAMM. This included many natural history specimens collected by members of the Institution.

18th Century Items from the Pacific Collection

Collected by Admiral Frances Godolphin Bond, a Captain in Bligh's second voyage to Tahiti in the 1790's.

Taumi

Tahitian costume of a chief mourner worn during the funeral of a nobleman.



A gorget

A military neck plate designed to decorate a high-ranking warrior. It is suggested that this gorget symbolised the jaws of a shark, thus suggesting that the warrior adopted the qualities of the shark.



Pa

A large wooden bait hook with inward-curved point for catching shark.



Parry's Greenland Sledge

An impressive sledge was brought back by Sir William Parry in 1820 and presented to the DEI by Parry and Lt Griffiths in 1821. The purchase of this sledge at the Clyde River, Baffin Island is described in his Voyage for the Discovery of the North-West passage.



Detail from Voyage of Discovery by Captain John Ross

Hpaya - Seated Buddha

This life size figure of Buddha was presented by Captain Truscott, a member of the East India Company, in 1827. This seated Buddha is made of wood, preserved in lacquer and decorated with gold leaf. He sits with the soles of his feet in his lap, with his left hand in dyhanamudra (meditation), and the right hand in bhumisparisamudra (touching the earth). It has been suggested that this was inscribed after the sculpture reached Exeter, probably at the Institution.



Model of Exeter

This model of the City of Exeter was made by Mr. Caleb Hedgeland and presented to the DEI in 1824. It was loaned to RAMM in c.1960 who then purchased it in 1994.

In a Museum

Hardy's poem was inspired by the cast of a fossil Archaeopteryx at RAMM. When the fossil was first found in the late 19th Century it caused quite a stir at RAMM.

Having many features in common with both dinosaurs and birds, for example teeth and feathers, it provided evidence for the missing evolutionary link and became a key specimen in the debate about evolution which originated at the Institution.

In a Museum

*Here's the mould of musical bird long passed from light,
Which over the earth before man came was winging;
There's a contralto voice I heard last night,
That lodges with me still in its sweet singing.*

Thomas Hardy