

DORKING MUSEUM REOPENS WITH AMAZING FOSSIL DISPLAY

Dorking Museum is justly famous for the Cubitt fossil collection. This is one of the most outstanding ensembles of Cretaceous and Ice Age fossils in the country. Founded in 1976 Dorking Museum once had the Dickensian ambience of The Old Curiosity Shop curated by Steptoe & Son. Items were randomly displayed with no chronology and no attempt to present the history of Dorking geological, archaeological and historical. The museum's superb collection of fossils were collected from adjacent quarries owned by Thomas Cubitt and his son George Cubitt, First Lord Ashcombe. Some fossils were on public display, notably the tail of an Iguanodon and the type specimen of the pliosaur *Polyptychodon interruptus*. This was found in a nearby Chalk quarry by George Cubitt (or his labourers) and described by Sir Richard Owen in a paper presented to the Geological Society of London in 1860. The bones used to be displayed reverentially with minimal explanatory text in a case reminiscent of the reliquary of a medieval saint.

Sadly the major part of the Cubitt collection was stored away in the museum loft. For many years a notorious local geologist would lead groups of intrepid geologists from the Petroleum Exploration Society of GB, the GA, various GA Local Groups and assorted nervous Brownies, Cubs, Guides and even Scouts, up the creaking stairs to the loft. On arrival they would stare in wonderment at drawer after drawer of carefully labelled and curated fossils. The collection is particularly rich in Chalk fish and reptile teeth and assorted crustaceans. It also includes Pleistocene vertebrate fossils from the gravels of the River Mole.

The museum is housed in an old iron foundry owned by the Dorking and District Preservation Society. The museum has never received funding from the local council and has never had any permanent staff. It is funded purely by voluntary donations and run entirely by volunteers. Several years ago the museum received a large legacy. This has been used, after many vicissitudes, to refurbish the museum, make the building watertight and install appropriate climate control. Donations from the Petroleum Exploration Society of GB, the Geologists' Association Curry Fund and the Mole Valley Geological Society have been used to mount a professionally organised and described suite of drawers and illustrative posters. Polychromatic geophantasmograms display the geological evolution of Dorking and the landscape of the Mole Valley. Selected fossils are now clearly identified and labelled in a suite of glass-topped drawers. Pride of place is given to the type specimen of the Cretaceous sea monster *Polyptychodon interruptus* with an accompanying illustration of this denizen of the Cretaceous sea. Nearby the Iguanodon tail, a local dinosaur fossil familiar to generations of museum visitors is now displayed with explanatory text. The Mole Valley Geological Society has presented a suite of local fossils to the museum that are robust enough to be handled without being damaged by clumsy children of all ages. Details of the Dorking Museum will be found on www.dorkingmuseum.org.uk and of the Mole Valley Geological Society on www.radix.demon.co.uk/mvgs.



Thanks to a donation from the GA's Curry Fund this denizen of the Cretaceous seas is displayed in such a manner that it can frighten small children and enliven a visit to Dorking Museum no end.



Formerly the type specimen of *Polyptychodon interruptus* (Owen) was displayed like the bones of a medieval saint in a reliquary.

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