
Geology in Yorkshire's museums

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A historical perspective

The earliest museums of Yorkshire developed during the 19th century at a time when geology, a new science, found itself in conflict with the accepted teaching of the Church on the Creation. Examples of early museums are the Leeds City Museum (1821) and Hull City, Whitby and the Yorkshire Museums (1823)

Each was the product of a learned society based in an urban area. The collections of societies in Bradford and Sheffield also formed the basis of public museums. The Rotunda Museum (1829) in Scarborough is noteworthy, having been designed by *(the)* William Smith and Richard Sharp of York. William Smith spent his last years in North Yorkshire, and his nephew, John Phillips, who as his assistant received a sound geological education, became first Keeper of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society's museum and later Professor of Geology at Oxford. Many of Yorkshire's museums have their origins in the 18th century. The Tolson Museum in Huddersfield was a memorial to the two nephews of Legh Tolson who died in the First World War and the Craven Museum in Skipton (1928) grew from the Craven Museum and Archaeological Society.

What value museums?

Local museums are often the perfect entree to the geology of an area. A better guide can seldom be had to what may be seen in the vicinity, thanks to generations of collectors — professional and amateur — all with an eye for the informative, the curious or the beautiful. Displays may elucidate the landscape's foundations and show the rock types, minerals and fossils likely to be encountered. Man's exploitation of coal, iron, lead and stone often figure in exhibits describing the social and economic history of the area. Archives, including photographs, add another dimension to the potential of these treasure houses.

The following list gives basic information about Yorkshire's geological museums, allowing the reader to assess what each one has to offer.

Key to museum listings

D Displays: L=Local; R=Yorkshire; G=General geology.

TE Temporary exhibitions, ask museum for details.

COL Collections: L=Local; R=Yorkshire; N=UK; WW=world wide; m,r,f=minerals, rocks, fossils (M,R,F=particular strength); P, A & L=photographic, archive and library. Appointments should be made to examine collections, libraries, etc.

CAT Catalogues: Published catalogues of collections, histories of the collections, etc, which may be available for purchase.

ENQ Enquiry service: *= professional geologist on staff. Non- specialist staff & volunteers are often mines of information.

GACT Geological activities: Ask museum for details.

S Sales: Geological publications for sale.

AC Admission charge.

OPEN Fraught with problems! Generally I have listed basic details only. As a rule all close on Christmas Day and Boxing Day and most if not all on New Year's Day. If you are travelling any distance to visit a particular museum it is always wise to 'phone or look at their web site to check opening times. Afternoon opening may be no more than 2 hours!

The absence of one of the above headings indicates that it is not relevant to a particular museum.

Museums

[2024 note: Website links have been updated.]

1. BAILDON: Bracken Hall Countryside Centre, (Bradford Museums Galleries and Heritage). Glen Road, Baildon, Shipley, W. Yorkshire, BD17 SEA. D L; TE Occasional; ENQ Yes* via Cliffe Castle Museum; GACT As advertised; S Basic; OPEN Open throughout year but not every day.
<https://www.baildowntowncouncil.gov.uk/bracken-hall-countryside-centre>
2. BATLEY: Bagshaw Museum. Wilton Park, Batley, W. Yorkshire, WF17 OAS. TE Yes; COL L & N, m (WW), r, F (esp.local Carb.); ENQ Basic; GACT Occasional; OPEN All year.
<https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/museums-and-galleries/bagshaw-museum.aspx>
3. DONCASTER: Doncaster Museum & Art Gallery. Chequer Road, Doncaster, DN1 2AE. D L; COL L & N, M,r,f (esp. Carboniferous); OPEN All year.
<https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/culture-leisure-tourism/danum-gallery-library-and-museum-dglam>
4. FILEY: Filey Museum. 8/10 Queen Street, Filey, N. Yorkshire, YO14 9HB. D L & R fossils and G minerals; ENQ Yes; GACT Occasional; AC Yes; OPEN Good Friday to last the Sunday in October, Sunday to Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturdays 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. <http://www.fileymuseum.co.uk/>
5. GRASSINGTON: Upper Wharfedale Museum. The Square, Grassington, Skipton, N. Yorkshire, BD23 5AQ D L industrial heritage lead mining; COL L,R. M,r,f, P; AC Yes; OPEN April-July afternoons daily, August 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. & 2 p.m. to 4.30 p.m., Sept afternoons daily, October weekend afternoons only. <https://grassingtonfolkmuseum.org.uk/>
6. HARROGATE: Royal Pump Room Museum. Royal Parade, Harrogate, N. Yorkshire, HG1 2RY. D L. Development of C19th Spa; COL L. m,r; GACT Sample the waters!; AC Yes; OPEN All year.
<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/leisure-tourism-and-culture/museums-and-galleries/museums-harrogate-area/royal-pump-room-m>
7. HAWES: Dales Countryside Museum. Station Yard, Hawes, N. Yorkshire, DL8 3NT. D L; COL L connected with lead mining; CAT Yes; ENQ Yes; S Local geology; AC Yes; OPEN All year. <https://www.dalescountrysidemuseum.org.uk/>
8. HUDDERSFIELD: Tolson Museum. Ravensknowle Park, Wakefield Road, Huddersfield, W. Yorkshire, HD5 8DJ. TE Yes; COL m(WW),r(L),f(L&N); ENQ Yes; GACT Yes; S Basic; OPEN All year.
<https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/museums-and-galleries/tolson-museum.aspx>
9. HULL: Hull and East Riding Museum, (Hull Museums Service). 36 High Street, Hull, H1 1PS. D Limited permanent displays on geology of the area; COL L & R; m,r,f, P, A; No curatorial staff. Limited access to the collections by appointment only. GACT Occasional Open Days. OPEN All year except 5 days at Christmas, New Year's day and Good Friday. <https://www.hullmuseums.co.uk/hull-east-riding-museum>
10. HUTTON-LE-HOLE: Ryedale Folk Museum. Hutton-le-Hole, N. Yorkshire, YO6 6UA. D L. N.York Moors extractive industries; ENQ Basic; S Basic; AC Yes; OPEN Daily mid January to mid-December.
<https://www.ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk/>
11. KEIGHLEY: Cliffe Castle Museum, (Bradford Museums Galleries and Heritage). Spring Gardens Lane, Keighley, W. Yorkshire, BD20 6LH. D L. Geology of area & use of geological resources. Minerals; TE Yes; COL L & N. m,r,F (esp U. Carb, plants & Palaeozoic inverts); CAT Yes; ENQ Yes*; GACT Yes; S Basic books; OPEN All year, but closed Mondays

except Bank Holidays. <https://bradfordmuseums.org/cliffe-castle/>

12. LEEDS: Leeds City Museum. Cookridge Street, Leeds, W. Yorkshire, LS2 8BH. D* L & G; COL L, R & WW. m,r,f inc. Carb & Jur. plants; ENQ Yes, GACT Yes, S Basic; OPEN *Displays reopening 2008.

<https://museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/leeds-city-museum/>

13. PATELEY BRIDGE: Nidderdale Museum. Council Offices, King Street, Pateley Bridge, N. Yorkshire, HG3 5LE. D L. Special reference to quarrying & mining; COL L. m,r,f; S Local quarrying; AC Yes; OPEN Afternoons Easter-end October & winter Saturdays & Sundays. <https://www.nidderdalemuseum.com/>

14. REETH: Swaledale Museum. The Green, Reeth, N. Yorkshire, DL11 6QT. D L. Lead mining, dressing & smelting. Lime production; COL Lead industry; S Local lead industry; AC Yes; OPEN Easter-end October Wednesday — Friday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays 10.30 a.m.-5.30 p.m., and Sundays 10.30 a.m.-5.30 p.m. from November — Easter. Able to open at other times by appointment. <https://www.swaledalemuseum.org/>

15 RICHMOND: Richmondshire Museum. Ryders Wynd, Richmond, N. Yorkshire, DL10 4JA. D L. Mining; COL Minor collection. m,r; ENQ Basic; AC Yes; OPEN Easter-October. <https://www.richmondshiremuseum.org.uk/>

16 ROTHERHAM: Clifton Park Museum. Clifton Lane, Rotherham, S. Yorkshire, S65 2AA. D L. esp. Upper Carb. plants; COL L. M (WW),r,F; ENQ Basic; S Basic; OPEN All year, but closed Fridays & 25 December-1 January inclusive. <https://www.cliftonpark.org.uk/>

17 SCARBOROUGH: Scarborough Museums & Gallery, including the Rotunda Museum. Contact address: Town Hall, St Nicholas Street, Scarborough, N. Yorkshire, YO1 2HG. D* L, R & G; TE Yes; COL L, R & N. m & r(N),F(L); ENQ Yes; GACT yes through Dinosaur Coast; S General, local and regional geology; OPEN *Displays will reopen in The Rotunda Museum in Autumn 2007. <http://www.scarboroughmuseums.org.uk> and <https://scarboroughmuseumsandgalleries.org.uk/visit/rotunda-museum/>

18 SETTLE: Museum of North Craven Life. Chapel Street, Settle, N. Yorkshire, BD24 9H5. D L inc. some bone cave material. Working model of Ebbing & Flowing Well of Giggleswick Scar; COL Display specimens only, r,f; S Basic local geology inc. local caves; AC Yes; OPEN All Bank Holiday weekends, and from the 1st July-30th September, Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday from 10.30 a.m.-4.30 p.m. <https://thefolly.org.uk/plan-your-visit/the-museum/>

19 SHEFFIELD: Weston Park Museum. Weston Park, Sheffield, S. Yorkshire, S10 2TP. D L & G; TE Yes; COL L, N & WW. m,r,F esp. Coal Measure plants of S. Yorkshire; CAT Yes; ENQ Yes*; GACT Yes; S Basic; OPEN All year. <https://www.sheffieldmuseums.org.uk/visit-us/weston-park-museum/>

20 SKIPTON: Craven Museum and Gallery. Town Hall, High Street, Skipton, N. Yorkshire, BD23 1AH. D L. m,f; COL L esp. Craven Reef Knoll fossils; OPEN Open throughout year except Tuesdays. Closed Sundays October–March. <https://skiptontownhall.co.uk/craven-museum/>

21 WAKEFIELD, nr: National Coal Mining Museum for England. Caphouse Colliery, New Road, Overton, nr Wakefield, W. Yorkshire, WF4 4RH. D Coal mining history, science and technology; TE Yes; COL Items associated with mining industry for the whole of England, P,A,L; ENQ Yes; S Basic; OPEN All year. <https://www.ncm.org.uk/>

22 WHITBY: Whitby Museum. Pannett Park, Whitby, N. Yorkshire, YO21 2AH. D L including Zechstein evaporites & Whitby jet jewellery; TE Occasional; COL L. m,F; GACT Yes; S Yes; AC Yes; OPEN All year. <https://whitbymuseum.org.uk/>

23 YORK: Yorkshire Museum. Museum Gardens, York, N. Yorkshire, YO1 MFR. D R; TE Yes; COL L, R & N. m,r,F,L,P (WW volcanoes); CAT Yes; ENQ Yes*; GACT Yes; S Basic and more detailed; AC Yes; OPEN All year. <https://www.yorkshiremuseum.org.uk/>

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Further information

General

The World Wide Web provides instant access to details about museums and their opening times and URLs have been given where they exist. Inevitably some URLs will change with time, but a key word in your search-engine should bring you up-to-date information in a trice! The 24 Hour Museum (<http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/mapsea.html>) of the National Virtual Museum is another valuable source of up-to-date information for most of the museums listed in this chapter.