
42 Hancock Museum

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

The Great North Museum: Hancock is in Newcastle upon Tyne, within the university precinct [NZ 248 652].

Description

While the Hancock Museum has many wonderful things on display, from Roman artifacts, to life size models of modern animals, it is included in this book because its geology section houses some spectacular fossils, many of which were found in Northumberland.

The museum was named after two brothers, John and Albany Hancock. Albany was an expert on fossils, especially brachiopods, and on marine invertebrates, while John concentrated on birds. The Museum and its natural history and geology collections are owned by the Natural History Society of Northumbria, founded in 1829 and all but the oldest such society in the country.

Given that the most widespread rocks in Northumberland are Carboniferous, it is the fossils that are found in rocks of that age, 295 to 354 million years ago, that should perhaps hold most fascination for us Northumbrians. They range from huge trees and delicate plants that grew in ancient coal forests, to shells and corals that lived in primitive sub-tropical seas.

Arguably the most special fossil is the remains of one of the largest carnivorous amphibians which ever lived: Eogyrinus or Pholiderpeton. It exceeded 4.5 metres in length and hunted in the submerged and tangled roots of the swamps. Its bones were identified from Newsham colliery near Blyth by a Cramlington grocer and amateur palaeontologist called Thomas Atthey between 1850 and 1880.

Photographs

(Photo 42-1) The Hancock Museum.

(Photo 42-2) A model of a 320 million year old carnivorous amphibian (Eogyrinus).



(Photo 42-1) The Hancock Museum.



(Photo 42-2) A model of a 320 million year old carnivorous amphibian (Eogyrinus)