

IPSWICH SCENES

Ipswich Museum



PICTURE: DERRICK BANYARD

In 1846 local philanthropists planned a new museum for Ipswich, to be built on a new street to be called Museum Street. It opened in 1847 with the prime object of contributing "towards the free instruction of the working classes, in the science of Natural History, by providing for them a good museum, library, lectures and classes". On the first 'free' day there were 2,433 visitors, and on the first free evening (Christmas Eve!) 750. What an encouraging response! The venture ran into debt, and George Ransome, grandson of Robert Ransome, Engineer, went to Buckingham Palace and persuaded Prince Albert (husband of Queen Victoria) to make a contribution, enabling the debt to be cleared, facilitating transfer of the whole enterprise to the Ipswich Borough Council and funding by the rates, whereupon a new museum was built in the High Street and opened in 1881.

The thinking of those early days is shown by the long title of a book by the first president, William Kirby, entitled, *On the power, wisdom and goodness of God as manifested in the creation of animals, and in their history, habits and instincts*. Weighty lectures, sometimes two hours long, entranced audiences, the wealthy paying to occupy the front seats, the remainder being free. The tone of the museum was to uphold the morality of revelation and show natural history as it is, showing species without speculation.

One exhibit is a mirror that reflects the visitor's face and is captioned "*Homo Sapiens*, Human being. A live specimen of particular interest to you. We are the dominant animal of today. What is to come? We are all on a journey to the future, to where, what and why, nobody knows". There ought to be a Bible next to it and references for positive answers!—*Derrick Banyard*