

**CALENDAR OF THE  
HISTORICAL CORRESPONDENCE  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY, CAMBRIDGE  
1819 – 1911**

by

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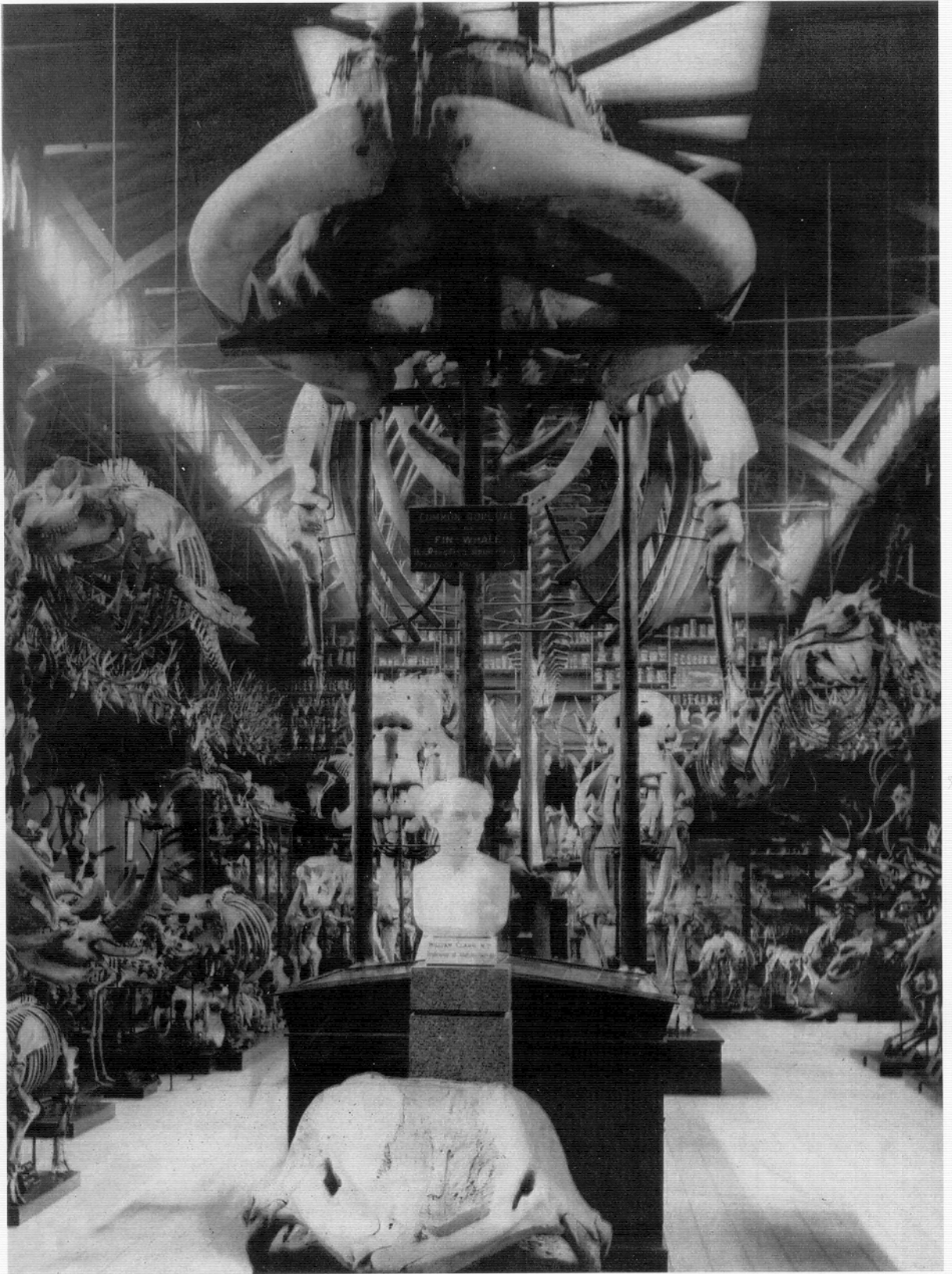
University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge  
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## THE ORIGIN OF THE COLLECTIONS

In 1865, the University of Cambridge decided to amalgamate various collections of natural history in a Museum of Comparative Anatomy. It was to be housed in a newly constructed building on the New Museums Site in the centre of Cambridge and to be governed by the Museums and Lecture Rooms Syndicate. John Willis Clark, often known simply as 'J', was chosen to be the first Superintendent of the new museum.

The first component of the new museum comprised of the collections assembled by the Professors of Anatomy, who had a great number of specimens illustrating comparative anatomy, physiology and osteology. The University had acquired the collections made by Sir Busick Harwood between 1785 and 1814, and a multitude of interesting items had been added by William Clark, J.W.'s father, who was Professor of Anatomy from 1817 to 1865. In the year of the latter's retirement, the new Museum of Comparative Anatomy was allowed to remove all osteological and invertebrate collections and the physiological series from Clark's Museum at the Anatomical School. This process was supervised by J.W. Clark, who may well have been careful only to choose specimens which were well preserved or particularly interesting.

The second component of the new museum was formed by the collections of the Philosophical Society of Cambridge, founded in 1819. In its premises built in All Saints' Passage, it displayed as early as 1832 'a valuable Museum of British and Foreign natural history' (Rupert Hall 1969: 26). In 1865 the Society offered the natural history collections as a whole to the University to be incorporated into the newly established museum.

At first, the two components were kept separate, the collection from the Cambridge Philosophical Society in the 'Bird Room' upstairs as the 'Museum of Zoology' and the collection from the Anatomical Museum on the ground floor as the 'Museum of Comparative Anatomy'. The amalgamation was only completed in 1877 when the new building was finished. The history of the Museum in the period ending 1890, when J.W. Clark handed over the chair of Superintendent to S.F. Harmer, is found in some detail in the biography of Clark (Shiple 1913: 257-293). The Museum became known simply as the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge (abbreviated UMZC).

The Museum of Zoology continued to acquire important collections of mammals, birds, and invertebrates, both recent and fossil, from all parts of the globe until 1908, when Harmer left Cambridge for a similar post in London. The documents catalogued in this Calendar are important sources of information about the origin of these specimens. They are also fascinating records of the wide range of collectors and donor, who have contributed to the rich holdings of the Museum.

## THE CONTENTS OF THE 'HISTORIES'

When J.W. Clark was preparing to hand over to a new Superintendent of the Museum, he had the foresight to collect all documents relating to the history of the collections into bound volumes. At the beginning of the third volume, there is the following explanatory preface:

These volumes contain all the letters and papers relating to the collection now in the Museum of Zoology which seem to me to be worth preserving. I have, however, included in them a few papers relating to other Departments, as, for instance, those of Botany, Geology, Mineralogy, which will be readily found by reference to the Index. Those might, I think, be with advantage removed, should any one of those departments form a similar series of documents for itself. I should further remark, for the benefit of my successors, that a good deal of information respecting the acquisition of specimens for the Department of Zoology from 1866 to 1890 may be found in the account-book, which I always keep separate from the other accounts of the New Museums. The correspondence between Professor Clark and Dr MacArtney is in the Registry of the University.

The tradition of preserving the most important documents relating to the origin of the collections was continued by S.F. Harmer, who took over from Clark in 1890. Harmer was a meticulous administrator, which is apparent both from the volume of the correspondence referring to his term of office and the careful annotations. When he left in 1908, this series of letters, catalogues and other memoranda relating to the specimens in the Museum extended to seven volumes. A few documents must have been added later, until 1911, the date of the latest item in the collection. The seven volumes, all with similar bindings, were labelled 'History of the Museum' on the spine and they have subsequently become commonly known as 'the Histories'.

The state of the bindings deteriorated over the years and in 2003 it was decided to dismount all the documents and preserve them in fascicles in accordance with modern archival practices. The work was funded by a grant from the Designation Challenge Fund of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

A large part of the letters refer to the donation or sale of specimens, others discuss the identity of these animals. In total, there are 2929 documents in the 'Histories' ranging in date from 1819 to 1911 (table 1). The majority of these (68 %) were written after Harmer became Superintendent of the Museum in 1890 (table 2). Only 135 items are printed, all others are autograph letters or catalogues in manuscript. A few documents were written in languages other than English, i.e French (68 items), German (14), Italian (10) and Latin (3). While 75% originated from the United Kingdom, letters were received from 47 countries around the world.