

Geology in Northumbrian Museums

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Geology in Northumbrian Museums

By Steve McLean Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne

Introduction

The museums listed in this guide are situated within the counties of Northumberland, Durham, Tyne and Wear, and Cleveland north of the River Tees. Local museums with geological collections or displays present an ideal starting point from which to investigate the geology of the immediate area. Such institutions tend to collect locally or regionally and often possess top quality specimens acquired over a long period of time, many from localities which are no longer accessible. This is particularly true considering the extensive mining history of the area and the quantity of specimens

which have found their way into museums as a direct result. In addition, extensive U.K. or indeed world collections are not uncommon, usually resulting from the prodigious efforts of 19th century collectors during the 'Golden Age' of geology.

In the area represented by this guide, there are three principal geological collections housed in museums. By far the largest is the collection owned by the Natural History Society of Northumbria at the Hancock Museum in Newcastle (currently managed by Tyne and Wear Museums). The earliest part of this collection dates from the beginning of the 19th century and now contains approximately 50 000 specimens, the largest proportion of which are local Carboniferous and Permian fossils. There are over 8000 mineral specimens, principally from the North Pennine Orefield.

The second largest collection, located at Sunderland Museum, is owned by Tyne and Wear Museums. Although the oldest recorded specimen dates back to 1815, the rest of the collection was begun in 1836 when the Sunderland Natural History and Antiquarian Society was founded. There are approximately 20 000 geological specimens, the largest part consisting of Permian fossils and rocks from the Zechstein strata of northeast England. The mineral collection contains over 4000 specimens collected principally from the North Pennine Orefield.

The third largest collection in the area is owned by Cleveland County Council and is housed at the Southlands Centre in Middlesbrough. The geological collection dates from 1975 and currently numbers 12-15 000 specimens, including minerals from northern England, especially the north Pennines, the Lake District and Caldbeck Fells, and regional Carboniferous, Permian and Jurassic fossils.

Museums

1. Alnwick

Museum name and address	Museum of Antiquities , Alnwick Castle, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1NQ, Tel. (01665) 510 777
Collections	World wide, Regional, minerals (particular strength), geological library
Admission charge	Yes
General opening hours	April-Oct daily
Website	www.alnwickcastle.com/

2. Ashington

Museum name and address	Woodhorn Colliery Museum Queen Elizabeth II Country Park, Ashington, Northumberland, Tel: (01670) 856968
Displays	(social and industrial history of mining and mining communities in southeast Northumberland, working winding engine)
Admission charge	No
General opening hours	Wed.-Sun. all year
Website	https://museumsnorthumberland.org.uk/woodhorn-museum/

3. Barnard Castle

Museum name and address	The Bowes Museum , Barnard Castle, Co. Durham, DL12 8NP. Tel. (01833) 690606
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Collections	Regional (Northern England [generally Northumberland , Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria]), UK, World wide, minerals, rocks fossils (Carboniferous plants and rocks minerals and rocks from around the world)
Admission charge	Yes
General opening hours	all week, all year.
Website	www.bowesmuseum.org.uk/

4. Beamish

Museum name and address	The North of England Open Air Museum , Beamish, Co. Durham, DH9 0RG, Tel. (0191) 370 4000
Displays	Social history of Coal Mining, reconstructed pre-World Wide, coal mine
Collections	Photographic records, Archive, geological library (relating to lead, coal and ironstone mining in North East England)
Catalogues	access to catalogues of Photographic records, Archive, geological library collections by appointment
Sales	Geological publications for sale., mining
Admission charge	Yes
General opening hours	summer all week, winter closed Mon. and Fri closed over Christmas period.
Website	http://www.beamish.org.uk/ www.beamish-museum.co.uk/

5. Berwick

Museum name and address	Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Museum and Art Gallery , The Clock Block, Berwick Barracks, Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed, ,Northumberland, 7Dr5 1DQ, TeL (01289 330044 ext. 269).
Collections	Local, UK, minerals, rocks, fossils, geological library
Enquiry Service	
Admission charge	Yes
General opening hours	summer, all week Winter, Wed.-Sun.
Website	https://museumsnorthumberland.org.uk/berwick-museum-art-gallery/

6 Chillingham

Museum name and address	Chillingham Castle , Chillingham, Northumberland, NE66 5NI, Tel. (01668) 215359
Displays	Local, (very small, Carboniferous plants)
Temporary exhibitions	ask museum for details
Collections	Local, fossils (Carboniferous plants, very small)
Admission charge	Yes
General opening hours	Easter-30 Sept., Winter by appointment.
Website	www.chillingham-castle.com/

7. Hartlepool

Museum name and address	Museum of Hartlepool , Jackson Dock, Hartlepool, TS24 0XZ, TeL (01429) 860077.
Collections	Regional (Northern England [generally Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria]), World Wide, (small), minerals, rocks, fossils, geological library
Geological activities	occasional
Admission charge	no
General opening hours	all week, all year

8. Middlesborough

Museum name and address	Dorman Museum , Linthorpe Road, Middlesborough, Cleveland, Tel. (01642) 813781
Displays	Local Regional (Northern England [generally Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria], General geology
Temporary Exhibitions	ask museum for details
Collections	Local, Regional (Cleveland, Northern England [generally Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria]), UK, World Wide, minerals (particular strength), rocks, fossils. Photographic records, Archive, geological library.
Catalogues	unpublished catalogues can be made available for study
Enquiry Service	professional geologist on staff
Geological activities	ask museum for details
Sales	Geological publications for sale
Admission charge	No
General opening hours	all year, Tues–Sun. Study and laboratory facilities available
Website	www.dormanmuseum.co.uk/

9. Morpeth

Museum name and address	Wallington Hall (National Trust), Cambo, .Near Morpeth, Northumberland, Tel. (01670) 773600
Displays	General geology (curiosity collection of rocks, minerals and fossils)
Collections	Local, UK (small), minerals, Regional fossils
Catalogues	available to view in building
Admission charge	Yes
General opening hours	April 1st Oct 31st all week, except Tuesday.
Website	https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wallington

10. Newcastle

Museum name and address	Hancock Museum , Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE2 4PT, Tel. (0191) 222 6765
Displays	Local, Regional (Northern England [generally Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria]), General geology

Temporary exhibitions	ask museum for details
Collections	Local, Regional (Northern England [generally Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria]), UK, World Wide, minerals (particular strength), rocks, fossils (particular strength) (see above), Photographic records, Archive geological library
Catalogues	Yes, other collection information can be made available
Enquiry Service	professional geologist on staff
Geological activities	ask museum for details
Sales	Geological publications for sale
Admission charge	Yes
General opening hours	all week, all year (except Sunday mornings).
Website	https://greatnorthmuseum.org.uk/

11. South Shields

Museum name and address	South Shields Museum and Art Gallery , Ocean Road, South Shields, Tyne and Wear, NE33 2TA, Tel. (0191) 456 8740
Displays	Local (geology displays within local history context),
Enquiry Service	
Geological activities	ask museum for details
Sales	Geological publications for sale
Admission charge	No
General opening hours	all week, all year (except Sunday mornings)
Website	https://southshieldsmuseum.org.uk/

12. Sunderland

Museum name and address	Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens , Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR1 1PP, Tel. (0191) 553 2323
Displays	Local, Regional (Cleveland, Northern England (generally Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria))
Temporary exhibitions	ask museum for details
Collections	Local, Regional (Northern England [generally Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co. Durham, Cumbria]), UK, World Wide, minerals (particular strength), rocks, fossils (particular strength) (see above) Photographic records, Archive, geological library No, but collection information available
Enquiry Service	professional geologist on staff
Geological activities	ask museum for details
Sales	Geological publications for sale
Admission charge	No

General opening hours all week, all year (except Sunday mornings)

Website <https://sunderlandculture.org.uk/our-venues/sunderland-museum-winter-gardens/>

13. Weardale

Museum name and address **The Weardale Museum**, Ireshopeburn, Weardale, Co. Durham, Tel. (01388) 537417

Displays Local (minerals and fossils, small)

Temporary Exhibitions ask museum for details

Collections Local, minerals (particular strength), fossils, Photographic records, geological library (small)

Admission charge Yes

General opening hours May–Sept, Wed–Sun August all week afternoons only

Website <http://www.weardalemuseum.co.uk/>

14. Weardale

Museum name and address **Kilhope, The North of England Lead Mining Museum**, Cowshill, Upper Weardale, Co. Durham, DL13 1AR. Tel. (01388) 537505

Displays Local Regional (North Pennines), restored 19th century lead mining site with water wheel)

Temporary Exhibitions ask museum for details

Collections Regional (North Pennines, collections relating to the industrial history of lead mining)

Enquiry Service

Geological activities ask museum for details

Sales Geological publications for sale (including souvenir specimens)

Admission charge Yes

General opening hours April 1st–Sept. 30th and weekends in October any other time by arrangement

Website <http://www.killhope.org.uk/>

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Glossary

Bibliography

At all times follow: [Countryside code](#) and [Code of conduct for geological field work](#)

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