

The Man Who Invented Free Museums

Do you enjoy going to a museum? There are plenty of good things to see in a museum. Some museums are free to visit. Who first had the idea of making a free museum?

John Woodward (1625-1728) was a doctor who believed the Bible. He liked to collect things. He collected fossils. He collected rocks. He collected anything old and interesting. He thought a lot about the flood which we read about in the Book of Genesis in the Bible. "How did God start it off?" he wondered.

No one knows the answer to this question for sure, even today. John Woodward thought he might be able to think it out by looking at fossils and rocks. This was a good thing to do and the idea he thought of was a clever one. Even nowadays some scientists who believe the Bible think there could be some truth in it.

John Woodward kept his collection in five wooden cases, rather like bookcases. They could be shut up with a flap so that the things in them would be protected from light and dust when they were not being looked at. He set out everything in the cases in a special way. They were set out to show John Woodward's idea of how the flood began.

When John Woodward died he said his collection could be given to the University of Cambridge. They could have it, he said, if they made a promise. What was that? John Woodward said that if anyone asked to see the things in the collection they *must* be allowed to do so. The university made the promise and so the first museum started.

Where is John Woodward's collection now? Nearly three hundred years have passed since he died! If you want to see John Woodward's collection now you have to ask the Sedgwick Museum in Cambridge. They look after it for the University and carry out the promise made all those years ago.

How did John Woodward think God began the great flood? He thought about gravity. Sir Isaac Newton put together his theory of gravity in John Woodward's time.¹ John Woodward knew the theory. He wondered if God began the flood by making an alteration in the way gravity worked, maybe even taking it away for a time. Perhaps he was right!

¹ See the lesson for 24th March.