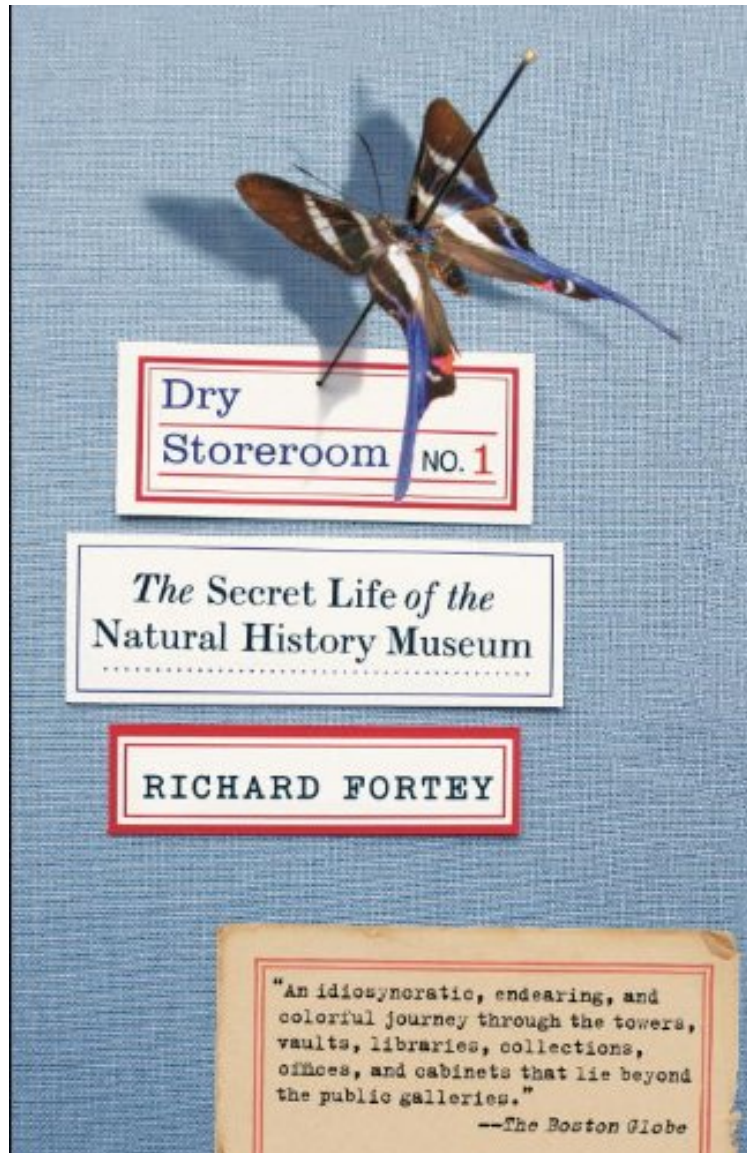


(Read free) Dry Storeroom No. 1: The Secret Life of the Natural History Museum

Dry Storeroom No. 1: The Secret Life of the Natural History Museum

Richard Fortey

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Richard Fortey : Dry Storeroom No. 1: The Secret Life of the Natural History Museum before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dry Storeroom No. 1: The Secret Life of the Natural History Museum:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Many cabinets, full of curiosities By Art Shapiro About 35 years ago

I had occasion to do some research in the entomological collections of the Natural History Museum, that Victorian colossus on Cromwell Road, London. I was left to my own devices. Eventually I needed to use a WC (i.e., a loo) and went in search of one. I wandered forever. Eventually I opened an unmarked door and was confronted with a small room packed with the enormous antlers of the extinct Irish elk. Natural history museums are like that. The Smithsonian has been called "America's attic." The Natural History Museum is the attic for the entire British Empire! Like all attics, it contains a great deal of odd stuff. Odd people, too. Richard Fortey, a career paleontologist at what old-timers like me still call the "BM" (for "British Museum," from which it is now divorced), knows or knew a great many of them. This book is partly a history of the Museum, akin to "Bankers, Bones and Beetles" by G. Hellman for the American Museum of Natural History (New York), partly an insider's memoir, partly a commentary on what museums are for, and partly--thank God--a collection of hilarious anecdotes about those odd museum people: the anal-retentive curator who saved string in bins by length, the smallest bin being reserved for pieces "too short for use;" the oh-so-systematic lothario with the well-curated, fully-annotated collection of pubic-hair samples of all his inamorata; the knighted Museum director who was so rotund that people referred to him behind his back as "Sir Cumference" and "the volvox" (Volvox being a perfectly spherical microorganism); and perhaps my favorite, the foraminiferan specialist Edward Heron-Allen, who was also a Persian linguist, a poet, a historian of stringed instruments, and an occultist who possessed an amethyst looted from a temple in India in 1855 and haunted by a Hindu ghost. If these teasers haven't piqued your interest, nothing will!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Museum Confidential

By Diane Hinckley We can be glad that Richard Fortey doesn't turn his nose up at gossip. This book is a double treat. You learn some neat facts about natural history and the history of science, and you also learn that there used to be a still in the belly of the London natural history museum's blue whale replica. Sometimes Fortey gets too cute with alliterations and other playful devices, but one gets the impression that he is merely getting carried away with the joy of remembering his years at the museum. Beyond the gossip and the science, this is also a book about the nature of work and how it has changed. What used to be a leisurely career at the museum, where for many workers there was minimal oversight and no real pressure to publish, seems to have become in recent years driven by the need for productivity and cost-effectiveness. Although this change is in some ways sad, it also means that a scientist can no longer retire before anyone happens to notice that he has spent his career collecting bits of string. And beyond being a book about changes in scientific work, *Dry Storeroom No. 1* is a book about the changing role of the museum. Is it a place to do science, or is it show biz? Even Richard Fortey admits that when it comes to engaging the public, there's a lot to be said for show biz.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Author's joy in his career shows through

By Julia Author's joy in his career shows through. I was hoping for more anecdotes and tales of getting lost in the wood-paneled rabbit warren, but I understand why such was not included.

A remarkable behind-the-scenes look at the extraordinary people, meticulous research, and driving passions that make London's Natural History Museum one of the world's greatest institutions. In an elegant and illuminating narrative, Richard Fortey takes his readers to a place where only a few privileged scientists, curators, and research specialists have been the hallowed halls that hold the permanent collection of the Natural History Museum. Replete with fossils, jewels, rare plants, and exotic species, Fortey's walk through offers an intimate view of many of the premiere scientific accomplishments of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Like looking into the mind of mankind and all the fascinating discoveries, ideas, and accomplishments that reside there, Fortey's tour is utterly entertaining from first to last.

From *Bookmarks Magazine* The Natural History Museum is, first and foremost, a celebration of what time has done to life, writes Fortey, whose engaging book similarly commemorates the vast record of life on Earth. As he meanders through the halls of the museum's back rooms, Fortey proves to be an excellent, witty guide to the scientists and specimens that give testament to this history. Far from being a dry read, *Dry Storeroom No. 1* weaves together colorful anecdotes about the scientists, their research, and the value of museums, defending evolution while admitting how much we still don't know about the Earth's species (starting with beetles, for example). A few critics pointed out that Fortey errs on the side of including too much information, but most readers will embrace his guide to, well, everything having to do with life.

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From *Booklist* Fortey, senior paleontologist at the Natural History Museum in London and author (*Life*, 1999; *Trilobite!* 2000), here turns his eye to the inner workings of a natural history museum. Though a paleontologist and an expert on trilobites, Fortey looks at all of the major departments of the museum, examining how they work, providing brief backgrounds on the sciences themselves, and telling stories of many of the museum's scientists both past and present. Explaining how science works through his stories from the museum, Fortey tells of truffles and how they illustrate the science of taxonomy; the Piltdown Man fraud and how more modern techniques exposed the hoax; how one of the ichthyologists found a lost Mozart manuscript while searching for a sixteenth-century book's illustration of a herring; and how the First Law of Museums never throw anything away turned up a cast of the Koh-i-noor diamond made before it was recut. Well illustrated with photos, this chatty book meanders from tale to tale in the endlessly fascinating manner of a good

storyteller. --Nancy Bent A fascinating tour. The Seattle TimesLifts the veil on the inner penetralia of the worlds premiere natural historymuseum.The New York of BooksAn idiosyncratic, endearing, and colorful journey through the towers, vaults, libraries, collections, offices, and cabinets that lie beyond the public galleries. The Boston GlobeFortey. . . in his affectionate portrayal of the institution in which he spent his working life. . . sneaks us behind the scenes with all the glee of a small child seeing for the first time the museum's iconic Diplodocus skeleton . . . always authoritative. . . the beauty of the book is that - just like a museum - you can visit the different sections in any order you choose, lingering in the places that most take your fancy. . . and there is plenty of solid science to enjoy, elucidated with brilliant flair.Sunday TimesFortey has a scientist's regard for fact but a poet's delight in wonder. This is a rare intoxicating insight into a hidden community intent on unlocking the universe's myriad secrets.Metro"Engaging. . . Fortey's writing is enough to make the behind-the-scenes work of the museum totally fascinating. . . (his) delightful book, like the museum it describes, is both rambling and elegant."Sunday TelegraphThis book is worthy of the place it tells us about, and that is a pretty lofty chunk of praise.The TimesRichard Fortey's wonderful book . . . shows the unspectacular elements of the museum collection as the most interesting part of its work, while placing the well-known exhibits in a new and often comical light. . . with eccentricity flourishing unchecked among its staff Fortey has amassed a brilliant collection of anecdotes about their habits.Daily TelegraphIn this loving survey of his life at the museum, Fortey. . . is never less than enthused by all the museum's collections.Financial Times Compendious and entertaining. . . much of the narrative interest of the book is carried anecdotally, by wonderful stories. . . Fortey gives us a vivid virtual tour of the museum's hidden stores and retired displays. . . it is a book filled with a passion for nature and pride in an institution that has done so much to compile its inventory. Fortey is a knowledgeable guide, with a keen eye and gentle humour."Evening Standard