

# A 'Natural' Exhibitioner: Sir Ashton Lever and his *Holosphusikon*

CLARE HAYNES

Sir Ashton Lever (1729-1788) assembled one of the major natural history collections of the late eighteenth century and in 1775 he put it on public display, at his museum, the *Holosphusikon* in Leicester Square, London. It was a distinguished collection by any standards: of the approximately 27000 objects he amassed, there were a number of natural specimens not to be found elsewhere in Britain, a substantial amount of ethnographic material from Cook's second and third voyages and good holdings of British and foreign antiquities. On display for all who could afford the admission charge, the exhibits were also discussed and written about by Fellows of the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries (Lever was himself a Fellow of both Societies).

A collection such as Lever's is a rich resource for historical enquiry because we can see the intersecting ideas and practices of natural history, visual culture, commerce, theology and so on at work in it. With this in mind, it is therefore surprising that accounts of his collection tend to underplay both the scientific and the general 'cultural work' it was doing, emphasising instead evidence of Lever's apparent eccentricities and lack of rigour. This article is not an attempt to recover Lever as a 'great man', but it is intended as a stimulus to more serious engagement with his work. It is true, for example, that Lever 'dressed up' as an archer, cutting rather an odd figure in Fanny Burney's frequently quoted description of a visit she made to the museum in 1782: 'thus, accoutred as a forester, he pranced about; while the younger fools, who were in the same garb, kept running to and fro in the garden, carefully contriving to shoot at some mark, just as any of the company appeared at any of the windows.'<sup>1</sup> However, this description of Lever can be interpreted, perhaps, as playful with the knowledge that Lever was the first President of the Toxophilite Society, a group that had been established to encourage archery as a sport and around which there was much antiquarian activity. It seems probable, therefore, that when Burney visited the museum, Lever was wearing the Society's uniform as described in the 'Rules and Orders' of the Society.<sup>2</sup> Lever's work was well known and valued in this field and he was described by one writer as 'the father of modern archery'.<sup>3</sup>

It is also true that Lever did not use a recognised taxonomic system to arrange or describe objects, for which he was criticised. Nevertheless, he was

praised for the order, neatness and labelling of his displays. Using evidence of the curatorial strategies Lever deployed, an aspect of the collection, and of British eighteenth-century collecting more generally, which has received little attention, this article discusses some of the ways in which we might be able to understand Lever's project: what the ambitions and goals of such a collector might have been and how visitors were intended to and did experience the collection. What interests me is not Lever's acquisitiveness – the collecting itself – but how he and others envisaged the role of the collection. Large claims were made for its utility and arrangement, so this article aims to try to establish the terms in which can we make sense of this 'utility' apparently cut free from the 'intellectual rigour' of modern taxonomy.<sup>4</sup>

Lever conceived his collection as one of natural history, a form of knowledge which was constituted rather differently from how we envisage it today. Its compass was much broader than it is now in three important respects. Firstly, it was a field dominated by a class of gentleman amateurs that included members of the aristocracy, gentry and upper reaches of the professional classes. Their collections (of paintings, sculpture, cameos and medals as well as *naturalia*) were, among other things, mechanisms of social standing: a means of asserting status through possession and knowledge among one's peers. Practice was restricted principally to observation, collection and recording, and there was, as Roy Porter has pointed out, very little impulse to publish although some, like Thomas Pennant, were so disposed.<sup>5</sup> For the very few who chose to make their living from natural history it was generally in patron–client relationships with figures such as Joseph Banks, the Duchess of Portland and Lord Bute. Patrons acted as facilitators, providing specimens and collections for others to work on and maintaining large complex networks of correspondence through which knowledge and clients were passed.<sup>6</sup> Lever was one of these patron figures who wrote frequently, in correspondence and advertisements for the museum, of his ambition to encourage the pursuit of natural knowledge, a role which many gentlemen envisaged as both useful and appropriate to their standing.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, this amateur domination of the field meant that there was little impetus for specially demarcated 'scientific' spaces where only natural knowledge was pursued.<sup>8</sup> Much worthwhile work was achieved by clergymen and doctors, between services or on visits, as the career of the most famous of the clergyman-naturalists, Gilbert White, demonstrates.<sup>9</sup> Natural history was often just one of a number of interests and it was shared, in a pattern of sociable exchange of conversation and specimens, among peers. In addition, natural knowledge was garnered in a wide variety of settings: not just in the field or in cabinets, but at fairs, markets, in taverns or on the streets.<sup>10</sup> Even the most informed natural historians of the period used these spaces: members of the Royal Society would have seen displays of

animals in taverns, such as Wildman's performing bees or, like John Hunter, wondered at the physiology of Charles Byrne, 'the Irish giant'.<sup>11</sup> As we shall see, a collection like Lever's was constituted of this broad cultural setting.

Thirdly, natural history as a subject was a large field covering not only all aspects of the natural world, including what we now know as meteorology, geology, zoology and botany, but also the 'works' and 'manners' of mankind. J. R. Forster, the naturalist on Cook's second voyage, described his function as the study of 'nature in its greatest extent; the Earth, the Sea, the Air, the Organic and Animated Creation, and more particularly that class of beings to which we ourselves belong'.<sup>12</sup> There were a number of epistemological ties binding the natural and artificial during this period, some of which we will consider, but it is worth noting that there was a strong pressure for generalism as another aspect of the amateur *virtuoso* tradition in which natural history was embedded. To specialise too determinedly was to risk breaching the boundaries of politeness, demonstrating thereby a weakness for the particular, rather than the moral and philosophical interest in the general expected of a gentleman.<sup>13</sup>

Lever collected for most of his life. He had an aviary as a young man and his natural-history collecting was said to have begun in earnest when he went to Dunkirk to purchase several hogsheads of shells which he had heard were for sale.<sup>14</sup> The collection, extended by both gifts and purchases, was very popular, attracting visitors of all classes to his country house, Alkrington Hall near Manchester, for at least five years before he took it to London.<sup>15</sup> He appealed to friends to use their networks to obtain objects for him, advertised opening times of the house in the Manchester papers, invited his neighbours to witness the unpacking of crates when new things arrived, and gave generously to others from his collection. During this period, however, Lever began to sell all his property in the city of Manchester, which, it has been suggested, is an indication of a reckless acquisitiveness.<sup>16</sup> This was, in any case, collecting on a scale and of such energy likely to breach the standards of gentlemanly decorum discussed above. The antiquary Thomas Barritt, himself owner of a saddler's shop, confirms this in his description of Lever 'as busy in the arrangement of his curiosities as a tradesman in his shop'.<sup>17</sup> An exchange of letters between Gilbert White and his brother John (vicar of the nearby parish of Blackburn, Lancashire, and an old college friend of Lever) throws further light on this issue. Gilbert White expressed concern at the news of Lever's intention to move the collection to London during the summer of 1774:

Surely that gentleman's scheme with regard to his museum is a strange one: for as I cannot suppose that a man of his spirit will take money, so if he entertains that great beast of a town for nothing, it will cost him thousands and be quite a ruinous expense.

John responded with the news that

I heard from him [Lever] immediately on his arrival in London. His plan is, he

says, 'to pursue Natural History and carry the exhibition of it to such a height as no one can imagine; and to make it the most wonderful sight in the world'.

Upon this plan I think he is right to exhibit in London, where he will not only collect with more speed, but also make the thing defray its own expenses, which no private fortune alone could possibly equal.<sup>18</sup>

This discussion demonstrates both the slightly precarious position Lever was in socially, and the nature of his ambition. It was this combination which the satirist Thomas Seddon played upon in his description of Lever as having 'more the swelling strut of a common showman, than the *dignified exhibitor*'.<sup>19</sup> Lever was not alone, among collectors, in receiving such attacks: for example, it is well known that Joseph Banks was satirised as, among other things, the *Fly-Catching Macaroni*.<sup>20</sup> Such satires enable us to identify the point at which the positions of such men were seen to challenge society's norms. Banks and Lever were both susceptible to attack because of their intense, specialised interest in the natural world that was seen to be at odds with their status as gentlemen, as we have discussed. There was an additional unease about Lever's position because he charged entrance fees which, although a financial necessity, could be seen to sit ill with his position as a member of the gentry. However, this view of Lever's position should not be exaggerated by us: Lever was knighted by George III after the collection had been open at Leicester House for three years, and he was socially active, fulfilling the public roles expected of a gentleman as a JP, High Sheriff of Lancashire, fund-raiser for the Manchester Regiment, and so on.<sup>21</sup>

The correspondence of Gilbert and John White quoted above also sheds light on how energetically engaged Lever was with the curatorial aspects of collecting. From a previously unnoticed sale catalogue of Lever's library, we learn that he was probably very knowledgeable about other collections and their display strategies.<sup>22</sup> Among the 358 volumes sold by Leigh & Sotherby in 1786 were more than twenty catalogues of mainly foreign collections dating from the early seventeenth century onwards. Many of these books were illustrated with engraved views of the rooms in which the collections were kept. Lever was therefore in possession of a historical and visual record of collecting upon which he could draw. The fact that Lever's attention to display was so well-informed suggests that an exploration of his methods will be revealing. Figure 1 shows a view of the first floor of the museum. Visitors were directed to ascend the staircase from the entrance hall below, so this was the first area of the museum seen by them. On the walls of the hall Lever hung weapons including spears and pistols, and in cases he displayed knives, long-bows and bundles of arrows. On the staircase, walls and floors was placed an assortment of animal parts: feet, horns, teeth and tusks, arranged alongside stuffed crocodiles and dogs and the elephant which, as one visitor put it, 'bids one welcome'.<sup>23</sup> In the cabinets were seeds, plants, birds' nests, calculi and other 'oddities'. There were a thousand objects, small and large, in this area which seemed to be operating, through diversity and profusion, on the model of a cabinet of curiosity: it was a room for wonder.<sup>24</sup> Within its



1. Interior of Sir Ashton Lever's Museum at Leicester Fields, London.  
Copy after Sarah Stone (1786, in private collection)  
© The British Museum

limits a sense of the variety of the material world and of the collection were simultaneously presented by the conglomeration of objects, natural and artificial, and of different shapes, sizes, textures, species, functions and materials.

The margin of the room was emphasised by the swags of the festoon curtain which ornamented the archway to the first of the rooms, its theatrical flourish suggesting what lay within was special and different. The use of this division in a partial inventory made in 1784, which distinguished the area of the staircase from those areas on the first floor 'Within the Curtain', suggests that this was an important boundary.<sup>25</sup> The inventory describes the contents of the rooms in varying amounts of detail, but what is clear is that almost all the exhibits were placed in glass cases (the exceptions being the very largest quadrupeds and some of the artificial objects) and that the display strategy was, in general, rather different from that used in the staircase area. The transition marked by the curtain seems to be that of one kind or level of diversity superseded by another. Outside it, the diversity of the different objects to be seen in the museum was on display; while, within the curtain, the restriction of types of object allowed the diversity at work within a single class to be demonstrated, such as that of birds which were displayed in the first three rooms. This strategy can be seen to facilitate contemporary patterns of scholarship, while not sacrificing too much of the impressive effects of the displays, which, we will discover, were crucial to Lever's ambitions. In other words those eager to find particular specimens, or to make the necessary comparisons for taxonomic purposes, could do so relatively easily, while the less specialised visitor was free to gather impressions and make connections prompted by the displays. This freedom, it will be asserted, was essential to the intended effect of the collection on the spectator.

There were seventeen rooms for the visitor to see beyond the curtain, twelve on the first floor, the remainder on the ground floor. In most of the rooms two types of object, quite different in kind, were placed together. For example, in the first five rooms, birds were displayed with fossils, shells and geological specimens. In the fifth room, glass cases containing insects and crabs lined the walls while in the centre some of the largest quadrupeds were on open display, explaining the alternative names by which the room was described – the 'Insect or Hippopotamus room'. In the Monkey room, apes were displayed alongside star fish. A number of the rooms were similarly named, after the dominant object contained within, such as the Ostrich Room in which a disparate group of objects including some musical instruments were displayed. The ground floor was dedicated to artificial objects (apart from the room containing the monstrous exhibits, which could be passed by).<sup>26</sup> Juxtaposition of a kind was at work in this area too. In the first room, known as the Wardrobe, clothes from nations perceived as civilised were displayed: old costumes from Britain, ladies' shoes from China, slippers from Persia, as well as some armour said to have been Oliver

Cromwell's. The following three rooms were dedicated to Cook Voyage objects (one of which, the Club Room, included some native American articles) which were described by Dr Syllas Neville as presenting 'a striking picture of the manners and customs of many of the barbarous nations in the Southern hemisphere'.<sup>27</sup> Here clothes, cloaks, bracelets and necklaces, fishing equipment, bows and arrows and 'idols' were on display, which would have made a striking contrast to the objects which had been seen in the Wardrobe, the Antique Room on the first floor (which contained Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Asian antiquities), as well as those to be seen in the hall on the way out of the museum.

Such contrasts or juxtapositions, each working in a different way, can be seen to have a number of functions. The reason for juxtaposing birds and fossils, for example, would seem to be to give rise to visual pleasure from the contrasts between the soft, often highly-coloured feathers of the birds and the hard textures and brown-grey tones of the fossils. In advertisements of the collection, Lever stressed the pleasure that was to be gained at the museum through 'the Elegance and the Ornamental Arrangement of the choicest Specimens of Natural Production'.<sup>28</sup> In one account of the collection (probably written by Lever or on his behalf) published in *The European Magazine*, this sense of the museum as a site of entertainment is emphasised. The writer describes the view of the collection depicted in the watercolour by Sarah Stone which we have considered:

Nothing can have a finer effect than the richness of this view at first entrance. The length of the prospect, the variety of the objects, and the beauty of the colours, give sensations of surprize and delight, that must be felt before they can be conceived. The descriptions of the enchanted palaces of the Genii, the Fairies and the other fabulous beings of the eastern romance, have a sameness and an improbability that very soon disgust. But here all is magnificence and reality [my emphasis].<sup>29</sup>

Essentially the museum could be recommended as a place for the pursuit of rational pleasures: there is nothing of the 'bubble' about such a collection, the writer implies, only the magnificent reality of the natural world. Underpinning this, although not stated in this account, is the sense in which natural history was prized because of the perceived security of its rational methodology of observation, collection and recording of the natural world. This guaranteed the 'reality', or the truthfulness, of the representation of nature in such a museum. As Oliver Goldsmith put it, 'other sciences generally terminate in doubt or rest in bare speculation, but here every step is marked with certainty'.<sup>30</sup> The pleasures to be gained from the observation of nature were, therefore, essentially moral ones because they were pleasures based on truth and reason.

The juxtaposition of the insects and a hippopotamus, or that of the hummingbirds placed in the same case as an ostrich, was surely meant to amuse as well. However, such conjunctions must also be seen as statements about the diversity of the natural world, and it is this characteristic that lies

at the heart of many of the ideas about nature that Lever's collection was seen as promoting.<sup>31</sup> There are a number of issues bound up together here which need to be identified. The first is the sense in which the diversity of the harmonious economy of nature was seen to be a sign of the wonder of God, as Pope had put it: 'A mighty maze! but not without a plan'.<sup>32</sup> It was a particular feature of British thought that the argument for God's existence from the design of His creation was widely accepted, and there were few challenges to the notion that nature should be studied as a path to greater understanding of the Divine purpose.<sup>33</sup> This idea was strongly associated with Lever's museum which was described by some as a 'temple', and a poem which the Rev. Percival Stockdale addressed to Lever uses this image to make a powerful point about the redemptive possibilities of the study of nature:

Repair to Lever's temple, and adore  
And blush, and shudder, and be fools no more...  
We, surely, tread on consecrated ground;  
How nature's Author strikes us, all around!<sup>34</sup>

A second element of the complex presentation of diversity in the museum related to the identity of Man in Nature. In the Monkey Room, the distinction between Man and the animals was considered in spectacular fashion. Here was, as Susan Burney described it in a letter to her sister in 1778, 'a room full of monkeys – one of which presents the company with an Italian Song – another is reading a book – another, the most horrid of all, is put in the attitude of *Venus de Medicis*, and is scarce fit to be look'd at.'<sup>35</sup> In the advertising puff of 1782 the description of the Monkey Room is rather different, no mention of such 'horrid' sights is made: '[it] is filled with a fine collection of the various species of that animal, among which are a young male and female orang-outang, conspicuous for their disgusting and distorted resemblance to the human form; the large African baboon, the long armed monkey, the dog faced monkey, the silky or lion monkey, from Brazil, &c. &c. &c.'<sup>36</sup> Despite the difference in the accounts, both writers emphasise their horror or disgust at the proximity of the apes to the human form. Here man and monkey are brought together by Lever in what appear to the spectators to be menacing, slippery, ambiguous ways: anthropomorphic presentation is played off against 'realism', the monkey is almost human as he sings or reads a book, but is rendered merely animal in the other more 'natural' displays. It is likely that Lever was well informed about the contemporary debates concerning the exact status of the ape in relation to Man: he owned a copy of Edward Tyson's hugely influential book, *Orang-Utan or the Anatomy of a Pigmie* (1699), as well as those of other key figures engaged in the debate, such as Buffon, and he was also acquainted with John Hunter and Charles White who were working on these questions in comparative anatomy. The displays could be read in two completely opposed ways: for followers of Buffon, they could be seen to play on the idea of the 'wretchedness' of the apes, showing how far they really were from being



capable of the accomplishments of Man. For others, such as Lord Monboddo, whom Lever also appears to have known, the display could work to affirm the relatedness of the species.<sup>37</sup>

The display of South Seas objects in the museum also raised questions about the nature of Man. Attention seems to have focused not so much on the objects in any detail but rather on their broad aesthetic dissimilarities from modern European objects. For some they were simply marks of the clear superiority of modern European society, as the quote from Syllas Neville's diary suggested, but for others, a more complex historical point could be revealed. Edmund Burke's famous phrase describes the possibilities of this kind of collecting: '[we] possess at this time very great advantages towards the knowledge of human nature, now the great map of mankind is unroll'd at once; and there is not a state or gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same instant under our view.'<sup>38</sup> It is hard to resist the sense in which Lever's museum can be seen to have operated as a 'map of mankind': for the writer of the 1782 puff, the walk through the museum was an imaginative journey through the world:

As he proceeds, the objects before him make his active fancy travel from pole to pole through torrid and through frigid zones. He beholds the manners of men in the forms of their habits: he sees the Indian rejoiced [*sic*] at, and dancing to, the monotonous sound of his tom tom; he sighs to recollect the prevalent power of fear and superstition over the human mind, when he views the rude deformity of an idol carved with a flint, by a hand incapable of imitating the outline of nature, and that works only that it may worship.<sup>39</sup>

The last aspect of diversity which I should like to discuss here is the emotional response which Lever's representation of nature engendered. Bearing in mind Lever's declared intention to encourage knowledge of natural history, it is surprising that praise, from Sophie von la Roche and the writer of the puff we have just looked at, is couched in what at first might seem rather negative terms. For La Roche, visiting the collection in 1786,

impressions follow one another so fast, and all the wonders of nature, and all the incredible artistic conceptions of form and colour, pleasant and unpleasant, are so tightly packed, that the mind and eye are quite dazzled by them, and in the end both are overwhelmed and retain nothing at all. Sir Ashton's house can indeed be called a temple of nature, where every possible mark of her miracles and good works is preserved.<sup>40</sup>

The piece in *The European Magazine* describes a similar feeling, although perhaps one from which it is more possible to recover: '[The visitor] looks at the vast volumes of actual information, that every where surround him, and is indeterminate where to begin, or on which to fix his attention most.'<sup>41</sup> The challenge to the mind, of which both writers speak, is of course intended as a compliment to Lever's huge collection, and a demonstration of the pleasure that each has derived from it. Both writers harness the discourse of the sublime for their praise of his work, claiming that Lever's representation of

the vastness of nature and the complexity of it was so satisfying that it served to reproduce the breath- or, rather, thought-taking effect of experiencing the sublime in nature. These reactions suggest that Lever's combination of juxtaposition, multitude and emphasis of visual delight was indispensable to the successful representation of nature. They imply that Lever represented nature inside the museum as it was outside it: full of wonder, all-encompassing, engulfing, dazzling and confusing, but ultimately something from which understanding could be generated.

Of course, it was exactly because of these responses to nature that taxonomists were attempting to uncover the 'plan' behind Pope's 'maze'.<sup>42</sup> The problem was, as most taxonomists realised, they had not devised a natural system of classification but were applying orderings which did not quite fit the 'reality' of nature. In addition, such schemes were not designed to manage the ideas about nature which we have seen to have been important for Lever and his audience. It was these 'soft' ideas which made up the broader significance of natural history, and it is probably true that they were of more widespread cultural importance than the classifying activities of taxonomists, which were, after all, symptomatic of them.

Thus, we can see that a strict taxonomic system was not helpful to Lever; he needed a flexible strategy which allowed the plays of meaning we have seen to have been important. In any case, systems were not universally applauded. The dangers of too much system were widely perceived and were seen to take three forms. Firstly, taxonomic systems were, as we have discussed, acknowledged to be artificial, unable to manage fully the complexities of nature. Secondly, during this period, although the Linnaean system was widely appreciated as the most useful, it conflicted with older systems, was subject to many alterations by Linnaeus himself, as well as by others, and new species discovered in the Southern Hemisphere, for example, presented challenges to the inclusivity of the system. Therefore systems were not seen as secure. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly here, they were seen as endangering curiosity by being too dry.<sup>43</sup> System was something that could strangle pleasure and the pursuit of knowledge. Oliver Goldsmith acknowledged the tension between the necessity to employ system and the enjoyment of natural history in the Preface to his *An History of the Earth, and Animated Nature*:

Natural History, considered in its utmost extent, comprehends two objects. First, that of discovering, ascertaining, and naming all the various productions of nature. Secondly, that of describing the properties, manners, and relations, which they bear to us, and to each other. The first, which is the most difficult part of this science, is systematical, dry, mechanical, and incomplete. The second is more amusing, exhibits new pictures to the imagination, and improves our relish for existence, by widening the prospect of nature around us.<sup>44</sup>

The models of nature, collecting and science that Lever was working with have been identified here as promoting views and experiences of nature not

susceptible to the ordering of taxonomists. It was to the second object of natural history which Goldsmith defined that we can see Lever's collection chiefly to have been directed. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that he supported the first by preserving and making available specimens, a practice that was widely appreciated among the scientific and antiquarian community. As Daines Barrington put it, in a letter to Lord Sandwich in June 1780 requesting that all the specimens from Cook's third voyage be sent to Lever, '[they] can no where receive such complete justice as at Leicester House, which from the vast additions lately made, may be truly said to be a national honour.'<sup>45</sup>

It is hoped that Lever's collection and his strategies have been revealed as rather more interesting and less absurd than has been thought previously. What Lever did was to gather and display not simply the flotsam and jetsam which came on the enormous tide of curiosity of the mid-eighteenth century, but a collection of objects out of which sense could be made. The elements of the interpretative framework we have marked out within which Lever and his audience responded to nature suggest that diversity was the stuff from which feeling, meaning and understanding had to be created.

\* My thanks are due to a great many people, including the staff at Middleton Local Studies Library who were very helpful. Christopher Gärtner, Rosie Grenzbach, Frances Haynes, Simon Haynes, Nichola Johnson, James Lancaster, Judith Miller, Andy Nolan and Maxine Smitheram read and made suggestions for previous versions of this paper. My parents have lived with Lever, uncomplainingly and with great generosity, for too long. Finally, I owe an enormous debt to Professor Ludmilla Jordanova for her inspiring supervision.

## NOTES

1. Quoted, for example, in R. D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (London 1978), p.30.
2. *Rules and Orders of the Toxophilite Society Instituted at Leicester House Anno Domini MDCCLXXXI* (London 1784).
3. T. Roberts, *The English Bowman or Tracts on Archery* (London 1801), p.79.
4. For a contrasting account of collecting which emphasises 'desire', see Nicholas Thomas, 'Licensed Curiosity: Cook's Pacific Voyages', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. J. Elsner and R. Cardinal (London 1994), p.116-36.
5. See Porter's 'Gentlemen and Geology: The Emergence of a Scientific Career, 1660-1920', *The Historical Journal* 21, 4 (1978), p.809-36, esp. p.815.
6. For Banks, see J. Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge 1994). For Lord Bute, see D. P. Millar, "'My favourite studdys': Lord Bute as Naturalist", in *Lord Bute: Essays in Re-interpretation*, ed. K. W. Schweizer (Leicester 1988).
7. See R. Holt-White, *The Life and Letters of Gilbert White of Selbourne*, 2 vols (London 1901), *passim*, and J. B. Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* (London 1817-1858), vii.469, for suggestive discussions of Lever in this regard. Excerpts from Lever's advertisements are printed in W. J. Smith, 'The Life and Activities of Sir Ashton Lever of Alkington, 1729-1788', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 72 (1962), p.61-92. Lever was an active supporter of other collections and was particularly generous to Richard Greene, who had a similar but smaller museum in Lichfield. Greene dedicated a catalogue of his collection jointly to Sir Ashton and Thomas Pennant (R. Greene, *Catalogue of the Lichfield Museum*, Lichfield 1786).

8. A. Ophir and S. Shapin, 'The Place of Knowledge: A Methodological Survey', *Science in Context* 4 (1991), p.3-21.
9. See Holt-White, *The Life and Letters of Gilbert White*.
10. See Altick, *The Shows of London*, and *The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-1765*, ed. D. Vaisey (Oxford 1984), *passim*, for metropolitan and rural natural exhibitions.
11. For Hunter's interest in Byrne, see J. Kobler, *The Reluctant Surgeon* (New York 1960).
12. Quoted in Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment*, p.92.
13. See Shapin's "'A Scholar and a Gentleman": The Problematic Identity of the Scientific Practitioner in Early Modern England', *History of Science* 29 (1991), p.279-327.
14. This information is taken from a biographical account of Lever which was published as a 'puff' to encourage sales of lottery tickets for the sale of the collection in *The European Magazine*, August 1784, p.83-85.
15. A description of the collection during this period was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* 43 (1773), p.219-21. For the prominence of Lever's collection in the area, see J. Ogden, *A Poem, on the Museum at Alkington Belonging to Sir Ashton Lever* (Manchester 1774).
16. Smith, 'The Life and Activities of Sir Ashton Lever', p.75.
17. For Thomas Barritt (1743-1820), see *DNB*.
18. Holt-White, *The Life and Letters of Gilbert White*, i.260, 262.
19. Quoted in Smith, 'The Life and Activities of Sir Ashton Lever', p.79.
20. See Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment*, p.61-67.
21. Patricia Kell's comment that 'the single most impressive act of social advancement through the medium of the collection was that of Sir Ashton Lever's knighthood' is, I think, an overstatement (*British Collecting 1656-1800: Scientific Inquiry and Social Practice*, Oxford University unpublished D.Phil. 1996, p.247). Lever's father had been knighted by George II in 1736 after his term of office as High Sheriff of Lancashire and, therefore, in the context of his family and other interests, Lever's elevation appears less extraordinary.
22. *A Catalogue of the Valuable Library of Sir Ashton Lever consisting of Books [...] together with the beautiful drawings in Natural History by Miss Stone which will be sold by Auction by Leigh and Sotheby* (British Library, PR1B44). The catalogue sheds new light on how Sarah Stone's watercolours left Lever's possession. Lever may have commissioned the drawings from the artist for a catalogue of the collection I believe he was planning but which was never completed. However, the watercolour illustrated here does not appear to have been among those sold in the auction. For the work of Sarah Stone, see C. E. Jackson, *Sarah Stone. Natural Curiosities from the New Worlds* (London 1998).
23. *Sophie in London, the Diary of Sophie v. La Roche*, ed. C. Williams (London 1936), p.112.
24. For cabinets of curiosity, see *The Origins of Museums*, ed. O. R. Impsey and A. G. MacGregor (Oxford 1985), and K. Whitaker, 'The Culture of Curiosity', in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary (Cambridge 1996). There was a similar arrangement at the British Museum. See R. and J. Dodsley, *The General Contents of the British Museum* (London 1761), and E. Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (London 1973).
25. Geo. III 24. Cap. XXII, p.318. The inventory was attached as a schedule to the Act of Parliament which allowed Lever to proceed to dispose of the Collection by lottery (1784, Geo. III 24. Cap. XXII). This is the only list of the collection during the time of Lever's ownership. Unfortunately, it is very sketchy. For an account of the disposal of the collection, see Smith, 'The Life and Activities of Sir Ashton Lever', and J. C. H. King, 'New Evidence for the Contents of the Leverian Museum', *Journal of the History of Collections* 8.2 (1996), p.167-86.
26. In one of his many advertisements Lever mentions this room in the following terms: 'As Mr Lever has in his collection some very curious monkies and monsters, which might disgust the Ladies, a separate room is appropriated for their exhibition, and the examination of those only who chuse it' (quoted in Jackson, *Sarah Stone*, p.37). By 1784, when the schedule was made, the 'Monkies' had been removed from the room and placed in the main suite of rooms on the first floor.
27. *The Diary of Syllas Neville, 1767-1788*, ed. B. Cozens-Hardy (London 1950), p.295.
28. Quoted in Smith, 'The Life and Activities of Sir Ashton Lever', p.80.
29. January 1782, p.16.
30. *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. A. Friedman, vol.5 (Oxford 1966), p.229-30.
31. The contrast of the hummingbird to the ostrich was a comparison recognised as

demonstrating the variety encompassed both within the class of birds and more widely in nature. As Richard Brookes put it in his *The Natural History of Birds*, 'Of all the birds, the ostrich is the greatest, and the American humming-bird the least. In these the gradations of nature are strongly marked' (quoted by Goldsmith in *The Critical Review*, reproduced in *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Friedman, i.240).

32. Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, epistle 1, line 6.

33. For secondary treatments of this issue, see E. R. Wassermann, 'Nature Moralized: The Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century', *English Literary History* 20 (1953), p.39-76, and J. Brooke, *Science and Religion* (Cambridge 1991).

34. *A Poetical Epistle to Sir Ashton Lever* (1784). For Stockdale (1736-1811), see DNB.

35. Quoted in Altick, *The Shows of London*, p.29.

36. *The European Magazine*, January 1782, p.20.

37. For discussions of the issues involved, see R. Wokler, 'Tyson and Buffon on the Orang-Utan', *SVEC* 151-155 (1976), p.2301-19, and *Inventing Human Science. Eighteenth-Century Domains*, ed. C. Fox, R. Porter and R. Wokler (London 1995).

38. Quoted in *Inventing Human Science*, ed. Fox, Porter and Wokler, p.16. See Robert Wokler's article in this book for the development of 'conjectural' anthropology.

39. *The European Magazine*, January 1782, p.21.

40. Williams, *Sophie in London*, p.115.

41. *The European Magazine*, January 1782, p.21.

42. For discussion of taxonomy and its position in eighteenth-century natural history, see J. Roger, 'The Living World', in *The Ferment of Knowledge*, ed. G. Rousseau and R. Porter (Cambridge 1980), and A. M. LeROI, 'The Name of the Beast', *London Review of Books*, 11 December 1997, p.3-5.

43. I use 'curiosity' in the positive sense that the term could carry during the period. For a consideration of the multivalent nature of the term 'curiosity', see B. M. Benedict, 'The Curious Attitude in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 14 (3) (1990), p.59-98.

44. Reproduced in *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Friedman, v.349-50.

45. *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, ed. J. Beaglehole (Cambridge 1967-1974), vol.3, part II, p.1558. See also P. Kell, *British Collecting 1656-1800, passim*, for further evidence of informed appreciation of Lever's collection.