



# A RHINO IN HIGH STREET

Ipswich Museum - the early years

R. A. D. MARKHAM

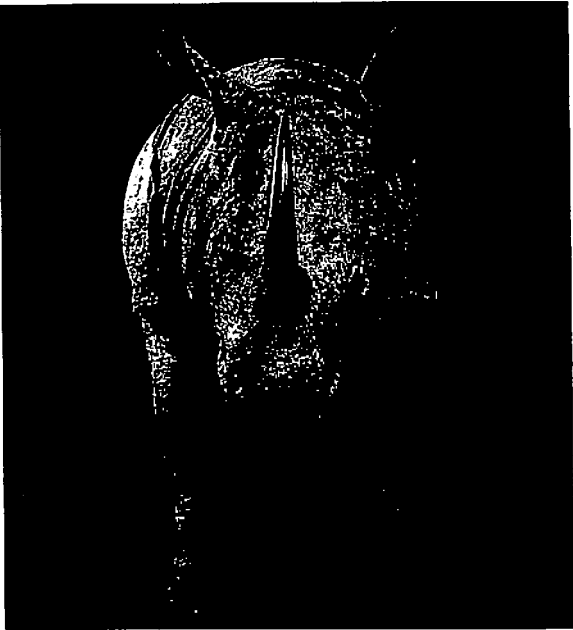
# **A RHINO IN HIGH STREET**

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**R.A.D. MARKHAM**

Published by  
IPSWICH BOROUGH COUNCIL  
1990



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First published 1990 by  
Ipswich Borough Council,  
Civic Centre, Civic Drive, Ipswich IP1 2EE

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Edited by Howard Mendel  
Designed by Liz Dodds  
Set in Goudy Oldstyle  
Printed in Great Britain by C. H. Healey

ISBN 0-906688-12-4

*Cover: 'The Victorian Natural History Gallery' — a new  
display opened by the Worshipful Mayor of Ipswich,  
Councillor Sheila Baguley, 26th April 1990.*

### 22a. Rhino in High Street ▽

A crowd of people gathered in High Street on Friday 15th March, 1907, attracted by the spectacle of an Indian Rhinoceros being unloaded from Fraser's horse drawn pantechicon van.



### 22b. Rhino in the Central Gallery ▷

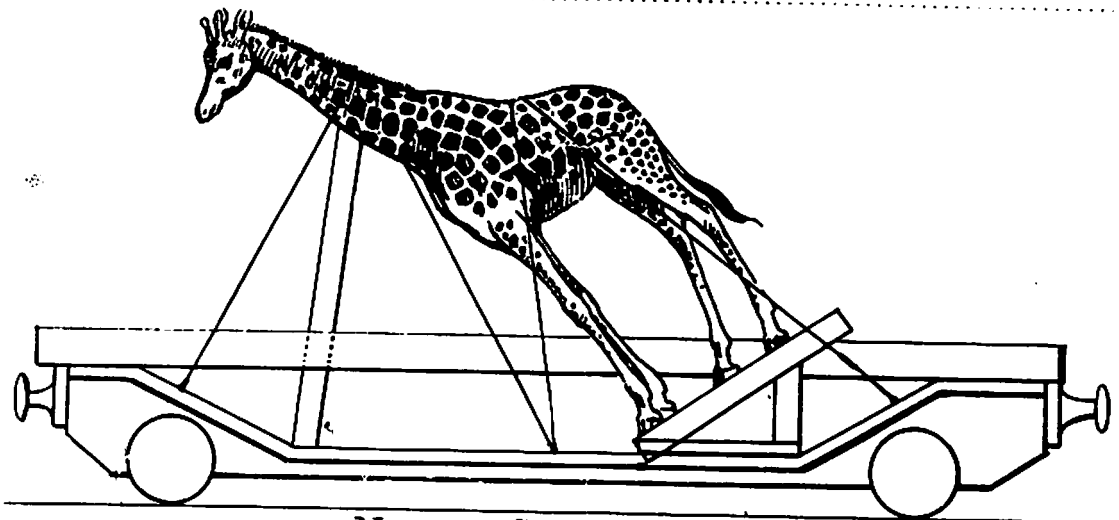
Measuring in at nearly 12 feet in length, 12 feet in girth and 6 feet 6 inches high, it took ten men about two hours to ease the Rhinoceros into the Central Natural History Gallery. She should have been carried to the rear of the gallery near to her present position. It was only because she was so difficult to move that she stood in the entrance of the gallery for over eighty years, welcoming or frightening generations of visitors.



### 23a. Transporting the Giraffe ▽

The Giraffe was delivered to the Museum in 1909, carried from London to Ipswich by rail. It was 16 feet 10 inches tall and in the course of the journey had to pass under a low bridge only 13 feet high. The animal was propped, leaning forward, on the lowest available truck and wrapped in canvas for the journey. An inspector was sent with this special load to see it through, and it was even suggested that he should travel jockey fashion on the animal's neck, but he successfully pleaded age, weight and lack of training.

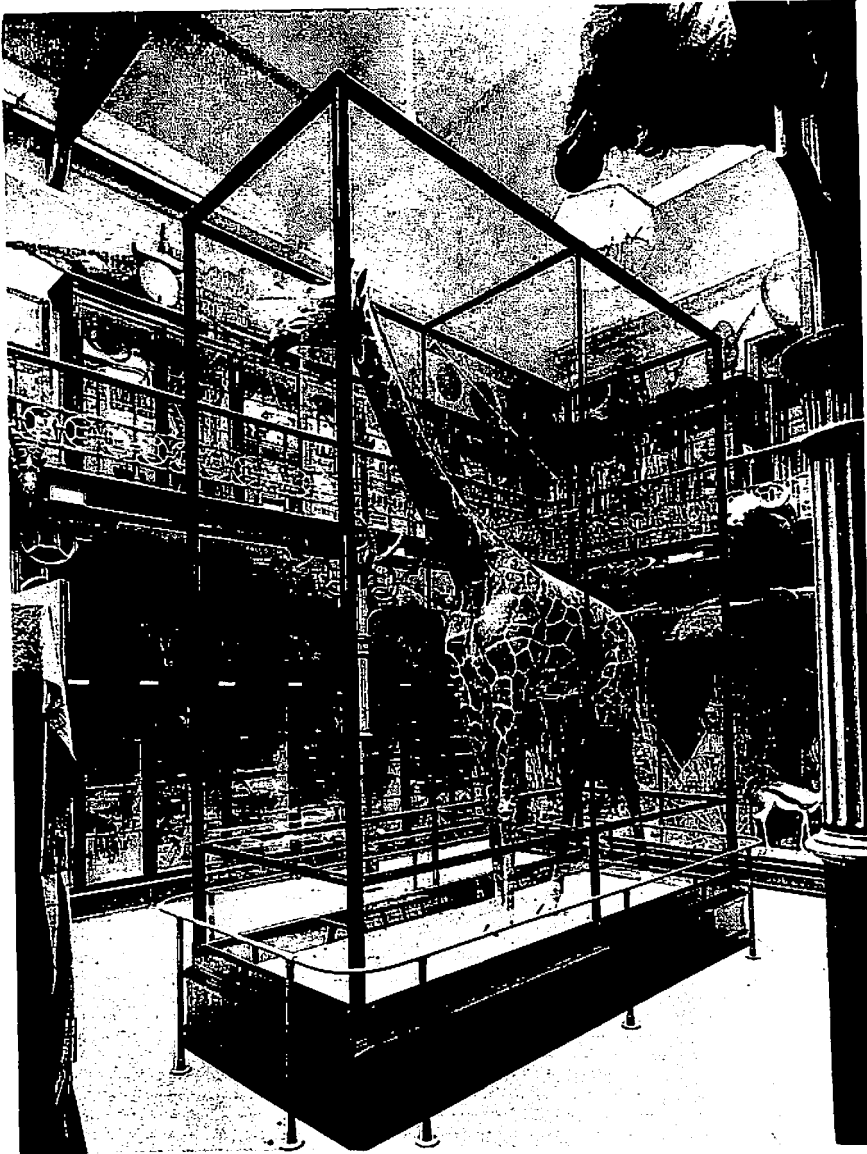
G.E.R. LOAD GAUGE. 13 FT. FROM RAIL LEVEL.



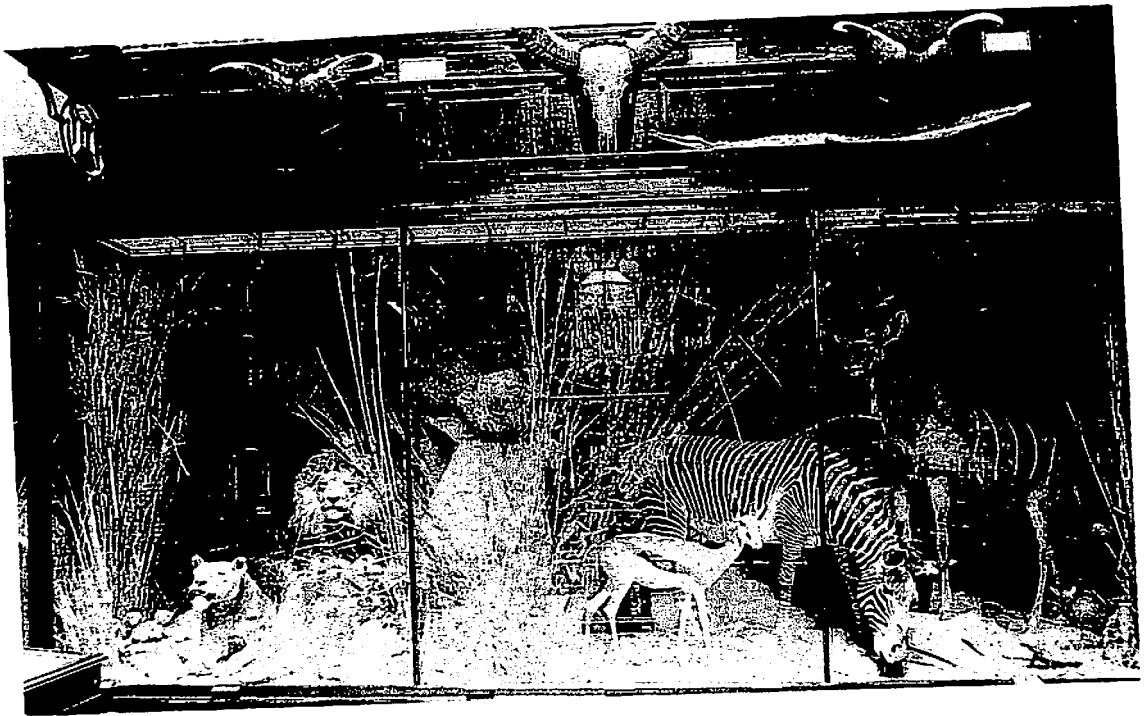
NO. 5.—GIRAFFE—  
STUFFED, MOUNTED AND WRAPPED IN CANVAS (*not shewn*).

### 23b. The Giraffe ▷

The Giraffe, an adult male shot in Somaliland (Somalia), was lent to the Museum by Mr John Hall of Altrincham, initially for three years. Because of its rarity and value it was housed in a glass case, '*surely the largest in Suffolk*', at Mr Hall's expense. The case was built on the premises and cost £121. 2s. 6d. It is said that the glaziers insisted that the Museum was closed while work was in progress so as not to reveal any trade secrets to competitors.



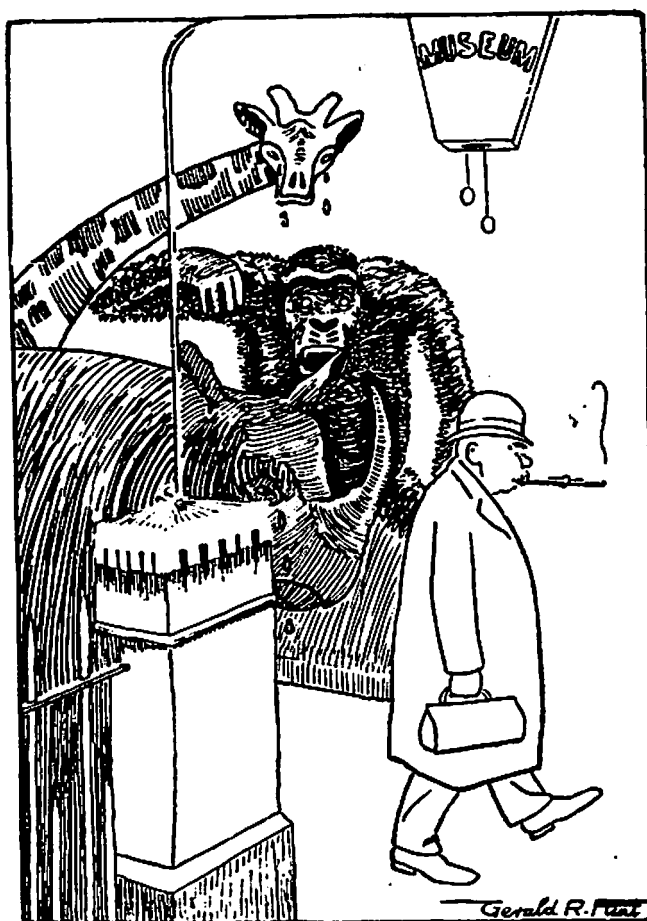




#### 24. Case of African Animals

When the High Street Museum was built, the original 'Feline Case' was brought from Museum Street and built into the end of the Central Natural History Gallery. There were major alterations in 1906. Two of the iron columns supporting the balcony were removed and replaced by an iron girder to allow an uninterrupted view across the front of the case. New animals were purchased from Messrs Rowland Ward Ltd. of Piccadilly, London — the Greater Kudu (*right*) from north-east Rhodesia (Zambia) and the Grevy Zebra from Cape Colony (South Africa) were particularly fine specimens. The lion cubs were born in captivity and died when they were only a week old. Three bundles of bamboo and grasses were used for screening and a large parcel of 'Insect Death Powder' deterred moth attacks. On Saturday 3rd November, 1906, in front of a large crowd of townspeople, the Mayor of Ipswich Mr Bunnell H. Burton unveiled the new 'Case of African Animals'. The Mayor arrived from his previous appointment, a conference at the Town Hall to promote the establishment of a new Diocese for Suffolk, with an entourage of Bishops and other clergymen, *'investing the event with an unexpected distinction'*.

GOOD BYE-EE.



## 25. Frank Woolnough retires

The giraffe, gorilla and rhinoceros shed tears as Curator Frank Woolnough, last of the 'Victorian' curators, retires on 30th March 1920, aged 74. This cartoon appeared the following day in the *Ipswich Evening Star*.

## THE VICTORIAN NATURAL HISTORY GALLERY [1990]

The physical and social upheavals associated with World War I distanced the Museum from its Victorian and Edwardian past. The contents of the Natural History Gallery changed little, although some structural modifications to the building did have an effect. The old stoves were replaced by central heating in 1926-7 and this contributed much to the cleanliness of the buildings and displays.

The long association of the Museum and Free Library came to an end in 1924, when the Library was transferred from High Street to new premises in Northgate Street. As a result, the old Public Reading Room on the ground floor at High Street became the Geology Room, and an entrance was opened up for direct access from the Central Natural History Gallery.

Excitement came to the Natural History Gallery in June 1955, when it was used for filming a sequence for the children's film *The Ship in the Forest* produced by the Rayant Pictures Company. One visitor who came to the Museum to look at the butterflies found this new activity '*much more interesting*'!

By this time the Natural History Gallery displays were showing their age. The specimens were deteriorating, the lighting was very poor and the dust of decades was accumulating. As the Museum developed there was pressure for space. What would have to go, the rhinoceros

perhaps? The very possibility caused readers of the local *Evening Star* to write in protest.

In 1974, under Local Government reorganisation, Museums became a division of the Ipswich Borough Council's new Department of Recreation and Amenities. A curatorial post for zoology was soon created. In 1976 a scheme to redisplay the entire High Street Museum was adopted. 'Ethnography' was the first stage and 'Africa' opened in 1979. This involved the removal of the old cases from the main first floor gallery and the installation of new cases to receive the ethnography collections from the balcony.

By 1989 only the Natural History Gallery showed its Victorian origins, but it was not carrying its age well. Piecemeal case modifications, deterioration and the removal of the exhibits that once peered down from the tops of the wall cases had changed the whole atmosphere. It was decided, in recognition of the Museum's long and interesting history, to restore the best of the old exhibits and recreate the Victorian Natural History Gallery. This new display would capture the atmosphere of the Gallery at the time when the exhibits were new and their arrangement reflected Darwin's then controversial Theory of Evolution.

The Victorian Natural History Gallery was opened by the Worshipful Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Sheila Baguley on 26th April, 1990.

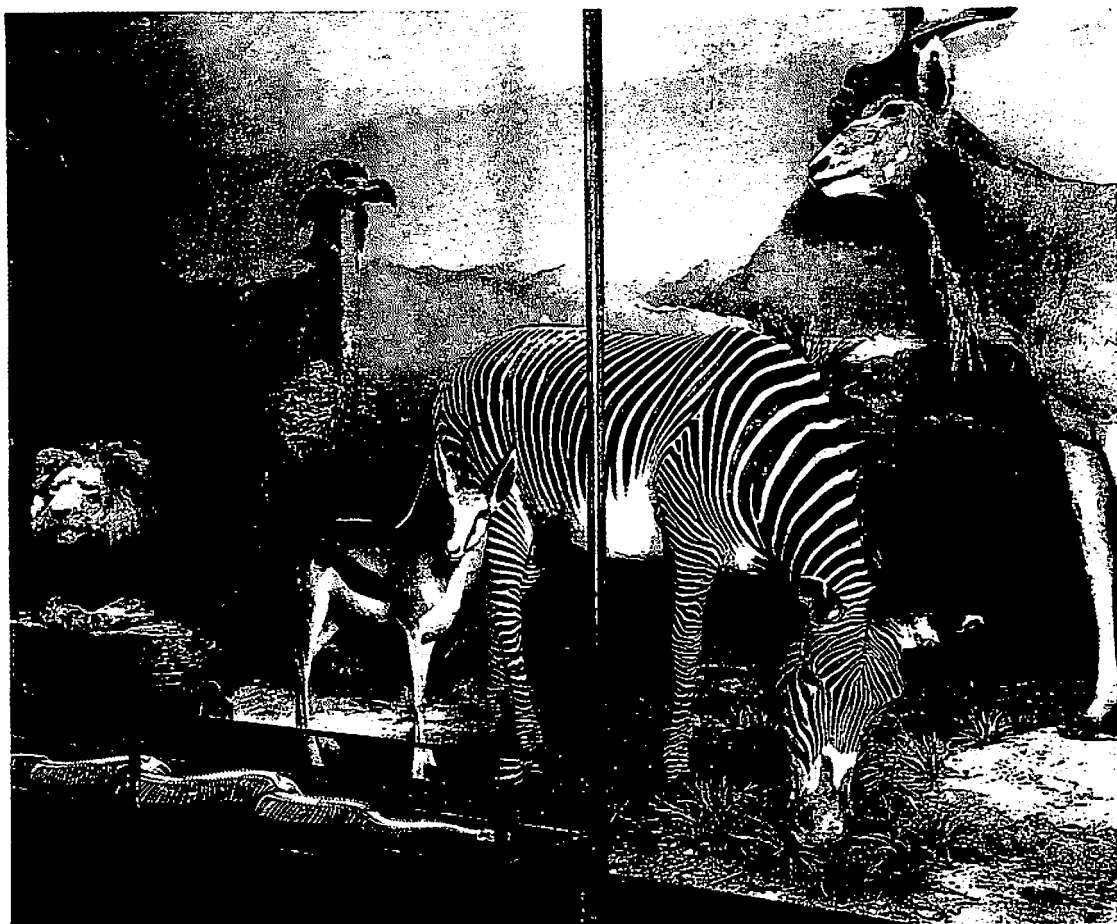


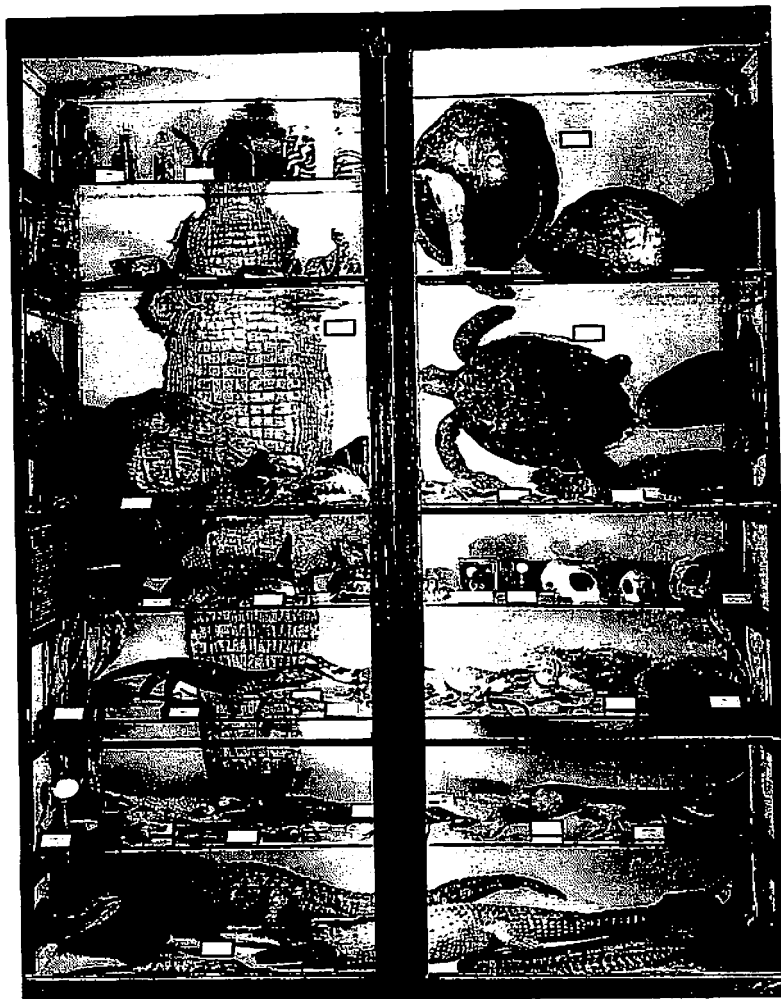
**26. The 'New' Victorian Natural History Gallery**

The Rhinoceros and Gorillas are in their new positions flanking the Giraffe, framed by the attractively painted structural iron work. Mounted animals and game trophies from a past age peer down at the visitor.

### 27. The Jungle Case

After extensive restoration this huge diorama once again looks as good as new. The original painted backdrop by E. R. Smythe dates back to the 'old museum' on Museum Street. The case was known as the Feline Case until its 1906 restoration, at which time it became known as the Case of African Animals. Now popularly known as the Jungle Case, it should not need further attention until well into the next century.



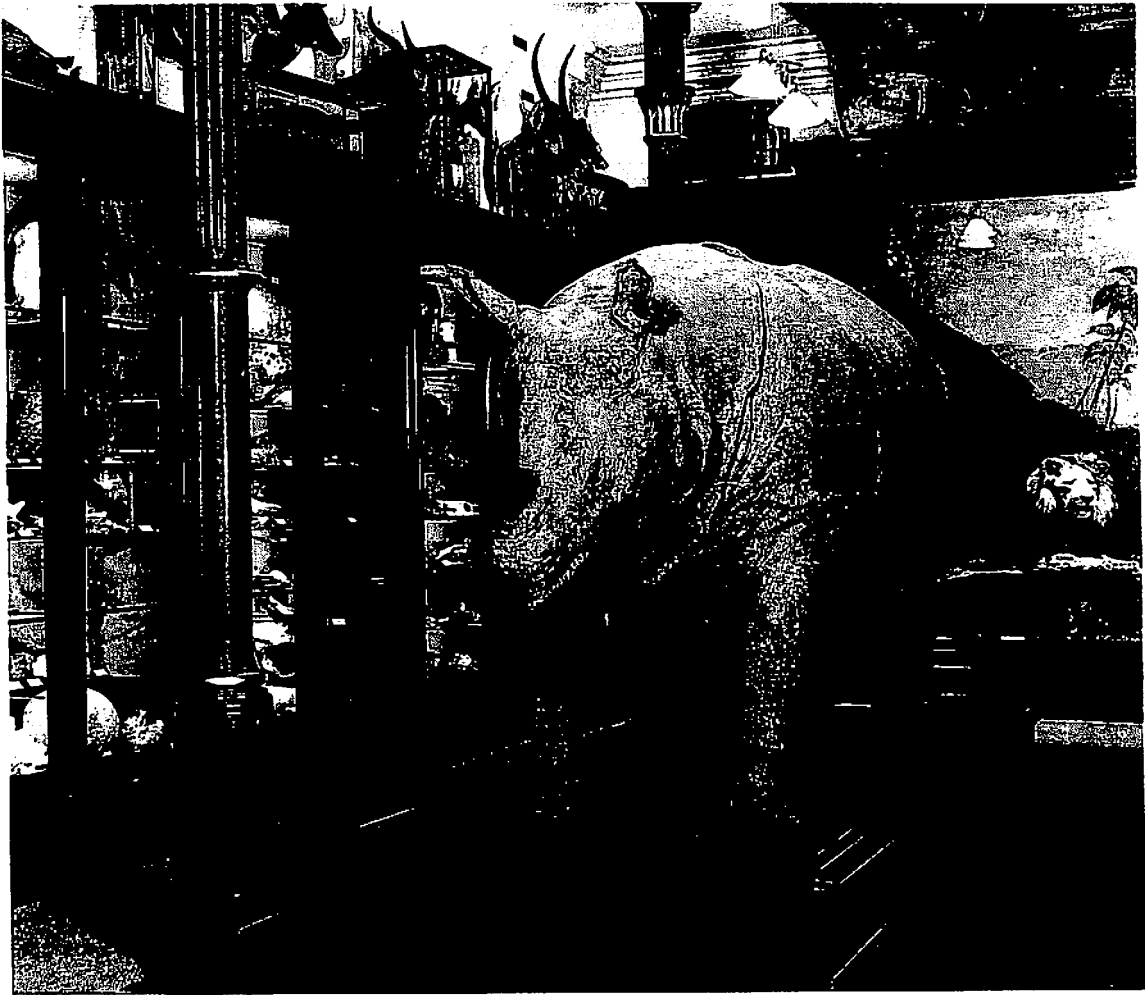


## 28. Refurbished Wall-cases

The specimens in the wall cases are arranged in evolutionary sequence from the most primitive invertebrates to the most advanced of the mammals, the primates. In this case lizards, tortoises, snakes and crocodiles compete for space and the attention of visitors.



29. Du Chaillu's Gorillas  
Ipswich Museum's Gorillas, the first ever seen in Britain, continue to excite interest. This case containing a male, female and juvenile has been extensively restored by specialist taxidermists.



### 30. The Rhinoceros

The Museum's Great Indian Rhinoceros has been given a new lease of life. Wear from the touch of generations of children has been repaired and the whole animal re-coloured. On her stand she appears even larger than life.



