



Inside the Blackmore Museum c1870
courtesy of Salisbury & South Wilts. Museum

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEWER SARUM

To the Editor,

Sir,

I must beg the hospitality of your columns with regard to Dr. Thomas Sharp's proposal to demolish the Salisbury, South Wilts and Blackmore Museum, and transfer it to the present Electric Light Works.

To begin with, the Museum is not a municipal undertaking. It is a charity founded by the late Dr. Fowler, F.R.S., F.S.A., and others in 1861, to which has been added the Blackmore Museum, the property of William Blackmore of this city, who erected it for his collections and maintained it for the public from 1864 to 1878, when he died and the Salisbury and South Wilts Museum took it over.

All the galleries have been built by private generosity, and not a penny of the ratepayers' money has been spent on them. The following citizens and residents in South Wilts have galleries etc. named after them:-

Dr. Fowler (founder), Matthew Henry Marsh, M.P. (Member for the City of Salisbury), Dr. Wilkes (benefactor), James Nightingale, F.S.A., William Wyndham (late of Dinton, donor of three galleries and trust), who is still living, with Edward T. Stevens, F.S.A. and Dr. H. P. Blackmore, M.D., (both directors of the Museum from 1861 till 1929).

He upkeep of the Museum is by voluntary subscription from Salisbury as well as South Wilts. Only within the last 25 years has the City of Salisbury contributed £50, and the Education Committee £50 a year. The Wilts County Council adds another £25. Subscriptions amount to £141 8s. and donations in the box at the door to £185 3s. The annual cost of maintenance is £1195 19s 3d. So it is obvious that the City of Salisbury contributes less than half the cost of the Museum which in addition to its existing floor space of 10,203 square feet has also ample land available for expansion.

Dr. Sharp, on page 60 of Newer Sarum, speaks of the present Museum as "unsatisfactory" but gives no reason for this somewhat sweeping statement. In what way is it unsatisfactory? For 88 years it has grown, its galleries have been planned by architects in conjunction with experienced museum officials, with special attention to lighting and economy of upkeep. Its display is adequate, and periods are progressively arranged. Some further reasons should be given and are to be expected.

And what is the alternative? The Electric Light Works (formerly the old Town Mill), which can be seen on page 38 of Newer Sarum. Can that offer 10,203 square feet of floor space, as well as ample wall-space? A glance at the windows, facing south, shows at once that the lighting is hopelessly inadequate, and further, that the

building would be on two floors, with the extra maintenance of staircases and extra staff for supervision. In other words, Dr. Sharp proposes to replace a planned Museum by an old one which was built as a Mill and not as a museum.

One other point arising from the destruction of the Museum is that "Colonel Baker's dining room," an elaborate circular room with a domed ceiling and solid mahogany door, built c1812, will be pulled down. The Museum has done its best to preserve it for 88 years, but even the most ardent Town Planner could not transport it to the Electric Light Works.

Yours truly,

Frank Stevens.

The Museum, St. Ann Street, Salisbury