The building in Broad Street, Oxford, that is now the home of the Museum of the History of Science, is often said to be the original Ashmolean Museum, which was accommodated there from its foundation in 1683 till its move to Beaumont Street towards the end of the nineteenth century. This is only partly true. In fact the seventeenth-century project for the building was much more ambitious and inclusive than the Ashmolean today, embracing nothing less that the reform of natural knowledge in the manner associated in seventeenth-century England with the notion of “Solomon's House”. Francis Bacon described such an institution, which he called “Salomon's House”, in his mythical tale of the island Bensalem – a “New Atlantis” – where shipwrecked travellers find a utopian society, whose success derived from a collaborative, institutionalised enterprise of experimentation, collection and documentation. This vision was influential in the founding of the Royal Society and of what, for want of a more official contemporary title, we might call the Old Ashmolean.

The Old Ashmolean had three floors with three complementary functions. The museum collections were at the top, a teaching room for experimental natural philosophy on the middle floor, and a chemical laboratory in the basement, which also accommodated at times anatomical dissections and a dispensary or pharmacy. Natural knowledge would be made in the basement and taught through lecture-demonstrations in the middle floor, while the natural world, and to a lesser extent the artificial, would be collected, classified, documented and displayed in a gallery at the top.

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Ashmole himself had anticipated the provision of teaching in the history of nature in the building and the middle floor became *Schola Naturalis Historiae*, or the “School of Natural History”. John Keill and John Theophilus Desaguliers taught experimental natural philosophy elsewhere in Oxford in the early years of the eighteenth century, but this activity was brought into the School of Natural History by John Whiteside, the Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum from 1714. It was he who began the collection of instruments, many of them probably made in London by the younger Francis Hauksbee. This collection was purchased after Whiteside’s death in 1729 by James Bradley, Keill’s successor as Savilian Professor of Astronomy, and, although he did not become Keeper of the Museum, he continued the courses of lectures, extended the collection and was appointed Reader in Experimental Philosophy in 1749. Bradley was succeeded in both his posts by Thomas Hornsby in 1763, and Hornsby continued the now-established practice of regular lecture courses (*Fig. 1*), illustrated by

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*Fig. 1.* One of a number of printed announcements of Hornsby’s lectures, issued for different dates and now preserved at the Museum of the History of Science. The verso of this sheet has been used for calculations (Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford).