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Corbett's curatorial duties only lasted until September 1911 when the first full-time professional curator, E. Cornish Senior was appointed. The impersonal face of bureaucracy caused Corbett some annoyance at the time of the changeover, but he and his society colleagues continued to take an interest in their museum, and this happy relationship between museum and society remains to this day.

So the mother of Doncaster Museum is just 100 years old and society and museum are joined in the centenary celebrations. One function is an exhibition lasting a few days only, but the other will provide a more lasting momento. A booklet, under preparation, reviews the growth of science in the Doncaster area since Tudor times. Research for this publication has been quite multidisciplinary and has provided innumerable ideas for museum displays; certainly enough to occupy the child until its centenary in 2,000.

P. Skidmore
Doncaster Museum.

CONFESSIONS OF A BALD EAGLE !

During January 1979 Chris Devlin of Doncaster Museum's natural history staff designed and constructed a spectacular display featuring some of the world's larger birds of prey. The centre piece of this avian extravaganza is a rather splendid American Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus), mounted in what is better described as a heraldic rather than a naturalistic pose.

The origin and history of this prize specimen is something of an enigma, there being no label, and as far as I can see, no specific mention of it in the museum's accession registers. Long serving members of staff can only remember that during the late 1950s or early 60s it had been on display in a glazed mahogany cabinet (now destroyed) in Doncaster Museum's former premises at Beechfield House, and was probably therefore part of the Sir William B. Cooke collection, which formed the nucleus of the mounted bird exhibits - though I can find no conclusive proof of this.

In re-displaying the eagle its base had to be removed, giving an opportunity to search for any clues as to the bird's past. There were no taxidermists labels or inscriptions of any kind, though a damaged corner which revealed that the modeller had used newspaper in its construction gave promise of dates and possible clues as to the provenance of the taxidermist if not the bird.

The precious base suddenly assumed the historical and scientific importance of any Egyptian mummy about to be unwrapped. The dismantling process was undertaken as if by a team of C. I. D. forensic scientists, and the unravelling of its contents was not unlike the unrolling and deciphering of the Dead Sea Scrolls!

The base, a competently modelled craggy pinnacle adorned with the customary sparse tufts of vegetation (Nardus stricta, Aira praecox, Linum catharticum and Xanthoria sp.) and false bird droppings, was composed of a square softwood board and a framework of two wooden boxes to which screwed up newspapers had been nailed. This skeleton had been coated with layers of pasted newspaper. A final layer of thick brown paper stuck down with animal glue had its surface sand textured and colour tinted.

Of the boxes forming the stout framework into which the Eagle's legwires had been anchored, one, according to branded marks, had contained 12oz 3oz bottles of Bovril. The smaller box bore a Cadbury's Cocoa label and an 'Eggs with Care' sticker, indicating that it had been used to pack something fragile - possibly eggs! Fragments of a post office sticker showed that the box had been posted some time during 1898 from (?) Lane, Stourbridge and a 4d stamp had been franked with the Stourbridge franking mark. Did we have the work of a Stourbridge taxidermist or perhaps was one of our taxidermists correspondents from Stourbridge?? The plot thickens. A dessicated mouse dropping found in a screwed up page of the Durham County Advertiser stuffed into the bovril box was analysed for tell-tale elves of a gastronomic nature but no conclusive proof was found.

The newspapers used to pad the framework proved rather more fruitful. No less than ten newspapers were identified:- The Church Times, The Field, Financial News, Illustrated London News, The Record, The Guardian, Nottingham Daily Guardian, The Scotsman, Newcastle Daily Journal and the Durham County Advertiser. The first four papers probably betray the background and social class of our taxidermists correspondents - the sporting clerics and idle rich. The provincial papers from Nottingham, Durham, Northumberland and Scotland may be clues to the 'home ranges' of these 'sporting clerics' etc. But the presence of 9 editions of the Durham County Advertiser and two of the Newcastle Daily Journal suggest that our taxidermist may have been from Geordie Land. British Taxidermists (Herriott, S (1968) Leicester Museum publication) and local trade directories list many potential candidates, though as the newspapers were dated from 20.11.1892 to 12.8.1898 (38% being 1898 issues) the celebrated John Cullingford of Durham who operated c.1878-1905 may have been our man.

So far investigations have suggested that our Bald Eagle was mounted not in America, but in Britain, possibly by a north-eastern taxidermist, maybe John Cullingford of Durham, not earlier than 12.8.1898. Although some progress has been made, the pedigree of our 'baldie', his collector and taxidermist still remain shrouded in mystery. There can't have been many American Bald Eagles in British provincial collections, so I would welcome help from any Bald Eagle enthusiast in trying to answer some of the outstanding questions.

The newspaper remains provided an unexpected batch of fascinating biological and social history data, most of which was extracted from a matrix of adverts for patent gravel pills, cough and corn cures. The Durham County Advertiser of 1897 reported that Dr. H. T. Gilbert had found 'some evidence of evolution' in Gateshead! On 27. 5. 1898 the "Advertiser" reported that the wet spring was feared to be having a disastrous effect on the survival of game chicks. Runs of salmon and sea trout, after a good early start had slumped, and the price of salmon in local markets was up to 2/1d per lb compared with 1/9d for the same period the previous year. The first grilse of the season had been caught at Burnmouth and weighed 2lb and a 30lb salmon, the heaviest of the season, had been caught at Goswick. The Newcastle Daily Journal 22. 6. 1898 reported that Mr. William Hardy, fishing in the Bowmont, had caught over two dozen trout, one weighing $1\frac{3}{4}$ lb. Collectors of antique otter records will no doubt be interested that the Durham County Advertiser 27. 5. 1898 reported otter hunting in progress in the River Swale and that two otters had been seen fighting at Batts Castle paper mills. The Newcastle Daily Journal 22. 6. 1898 recorded that Mr. Wilkinson's otter hounds were indulging in their annual fortnight's hunting on the Tweed, Till and Glen and had so far made 4 kills, the reporter recalling that in 1891 an animal had been killed at Riffington-on-Tweed. In The Field 18. 5. 1895 J. B. D. B. claimed that he 'never saw such a year for wasps', having killed 501 in 10 days in May. The Nottingham Daily Guardian 28. 8. 1897 noted that Major Jameson had been killed by lightning whilst gathering mushrooms in a field at Guildford - possibly an early record of Psalliota campestris for the Guildford area. The same natural history oriented newspaper reported on a visit by the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union to the Boston area on 24. 8. 1897 where they spent a pleasant afternoon studying the foreshore of the Wash, the banks of the Welland and the marshes in the neighbourhood of Frampton and Wyberton. The report made more play of the presence of the two great Lincolnshire naturalists Rev. E. Adrian Woodruff-Peacock and John Cordeaux than what these bastions of the natural history scene actually found. The 'Scotsman' noted the death of John 'Ratty' Leonard, an Edinburgh character famed for his rat-catching abilities. He could catch 50-60 in a night to be sold for 'sporting' (?) purposes at 4d each. A certificate of character issued by a Scottish Court read:-

"The bearer John Leonard of Edinburgh, practical rat-catcher, honest in every respect except in the neighbourhood of a whisky barrel".

Still on the subject of booze, the Durham County Advertiser 27. 5. 1898 reported that William Peacock, mineral water manufacturer, was fined £1 at Scarborough for selling Hop bitters and Hop stout with an alcoholic content above the permitted limit!'

Colin Howes
Doncaster Museum