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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Book Review: A Century of Zoology at the British Museum through the lives of two keepers 1815-1914 by A. E. Gunther

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Source: Lingwood, P. F. (1981). Book Review: A Century of Zoology at the British Museum through the lives of two keepers 1815-1914 by A. E. Gunther. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter, Vol 3 No 1*, 54.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1869>

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A Century of Zoology at the British Museum through the lives of two keepers 1815-1914 by A. E. Gunther. Dawson, 1975 533 pp; 33 pages of black and white photographs. Price £30.00.

The book was first published in 1975 and it is perhaps opportune that it should be reviewed in the year which marks the centenary of the British Museum (Natural History), with which it is concerned.

The book is primarily the individual biographies of J. E. Gray (1800-1875) and Albert Gunther (1830-1914) who were keepers of the Natural History Departments at the Museum. The biographies were in fact conceived separately; that on Albert Gunther by his son R. T. Gunther and that on Gray by W. R. Dawson. Both were eventually written by one author who is Albert Gunther's grandson.

The theme of the book is the careers of the two men in the museum. In a less substantial book this might be regarded as an artificial device for publication purposes. Gunther however succeeds in combining two comprehensive biographies of these two separate and different individuals with the development of the museum to which they contributed so much. Gray and Gunther as keepers presided over nearly a century of almost unprecedented expansion in the size and the quality of the natural history departments which eventually required their removal to two completely new buildings. This period may be viewed by some as the halcyon days of natural history. A glance through the book will reveal that conditions were far from perfect for those working in a professional capacity and that development of the collection to the extent they desired was frequently a thankless task. It was a problem that we tend to consider as one purely of the 20th century - a lack of resources.

The book is the result of considerable scholarly work, attested by the prolific biographic and bibliographic notes which follow each chapter and yet it is eminently readable, and even the slight touches of humour are not out of place. The format of separating each topic or period into chapters inevitably disrupts the chronological flow and leads to some duplication but greatly facilitates reference to the subjects covered. Those which are submerged within the chapters are readily available through the detailed Index.

Although this book will undoubtedly remain a standard biography of Gray and Gunther its main use, I suspect, will be as a personal view of a significant part of the history of the Natural History Department of the British Museum. It is certainly no mere duplication of the more prosaic account found in the History of the Collections (Vol. 2, Appendix, 1912). The two books are complimentary and as far as I am concerned are both consulted just as frequently and are both invaluable. Whether the present account is supplemented by the rash of books (including another by the same author) to mark the Museum centenary, remains to be seen.

P. F. Lingwood.

Mr. Palmer, now Deceased.
Balls donated by his widow.

From a label in North Hertfordshire Museum referring to hair balls from a cow's stomach.