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THE SHEALS FAMILY - TAXIDERMISTS - A REQUEST FOR INFORMATION.

Have you heard the one about the Irish taxidermist? Well if you have I would like to know. The Ulster Museum is planning a major exhibition on the life and work of James Sheals and his two sons Alfred and Thomas - taxidermists of 'The Old Shop' Corporation Street in Belfast. Information on Sheals specimens in British museums is urgently required. The family was in business from around 1860-1930 and during that time they mounted material for museums all over the world. Even the great Rothschild himself sent material to Belfast to be mounted for his museum at Tring.

Their work is of a remarkably high quality comparing favourably with the other great Victorian taxidermists such as Ward and Gunn. The 'Inside Story' exhibition featured examples of their work including a magnificently mounted Lammergeier attacking a Wild cat; artistic licence perhaps but it works well.

The Sheals family are perhaps little known outside Ireland. The exhibition in 1983 may change the situation. In the meantime do you possess Sheals' mounts? They are easily identified by the signature or stamp on the bottom of the base. The exhibition is to feature aspects of historical taxidermy and its development during the Victorian era. Any information or offer of material would be gratefully received.

An Irish taxidermist - it has all the ingredients of a good joke. The quality of the taxidermy however will ensure the Sheals have the last laugh!

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