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Title: Dodos and partnership: A Celebration of Publication and Exhibition at Kendal Museum

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Source: Davies, C. (2011). Dodos and partnership: A Celebration of Publication and Exhibition at Kendal Museum. *NatSCA News, Issue 21*, 28 - 34.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/98>

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Dodos and Partnership: A Celebration of Publication and Exhibition at Kendal Museum

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Abstract

This article tells the story of Kendall Museum working in partnership with Kendal College. The project, initiated to illustrate the taxidermy collections during a time of adversity, has now resulted in publication, educational programmes and a new permanent display illustrating the unique natural history heritage held with the Museums' collections.

Founded in 1796, Kendal Museum's fascinating collections include archaeology, history, geology and natural history from around the globe. Following a programme of conservation and cataloguing in 2008, grant funded by Renaissance North West, the Taxidermy collection was once again revealed as being a magnificent irreplaceable collection of Victorian taxidermy, of world wide importance (Fig. 1) and worthy of publication. As Curator of Natural History I felt that in uncertain times it was essential to record and illustrate the collection, to prove at a glance that here, in the Town Museum, was something truly worth saving and looking after.

In 2008 I was delighted to host the U.K. Guild of Taxidermists conference at Kendal Museum. This served to bring together some of the leading taxidermists working today and to enable members to examine unparalleled examples of the work of known Victorian taxidermists, held in the Museum collection. It was at this



Fig. 1. Kendal's world class collection in the news.

conference that I first came across the work of the British Historical Taxidermy Society (BHTS), founded in 2004 by Martin Dunne and now firmly established as the leading organisation concerned with British historical taxidermy. The BHTS works closely with collectors, museums, local authorities, authors, schools, researchers and the media not only to advise, preserve and record historical taxidermy but to promote this often under-appreciated subject. The BHTS made a repeat visit in May 2008 and a working partnership was formed with the aim of publishing an accessible book to illustrate the Taxidermy to the general public. Guided by their expertise in historical taxidermy, each case was checked, cleaned and photographed.

After 2 years work Kendal Museum was delighted to host the book launch of the first publication of the BHTS in conjunction with the Museum as a pictorial record of the taxidermy collection. (Fig. 2). This book features photographs of many exquisite and exceptional pieces of taxidermy, including a number of rare and extinct specimens, most of which have not been on display. The book includes examples of the work of H. Murray & Son, Rowland Ward, Peter Spicer, Charles Kirk and Edward Gerrard among others. The launch of this book coincided with the new partnership of Kendal Museum with Kendal College, which began in April 2009, one of a number of partnerships between the College and South Lakeland District Council aimed at rejuvenating the Museum. David Bellamy was our special guest; he first discovered Kendal Museum when he made his first visits to the Lake District, and it has remained a firm favorite with him ever since (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. The cover of the first book: The Kendal Museum Collection of Fine Art Taxidermy.



Fig. 3. Launching the first book with David Bellamy.

During this research into the collection it became apparent that Kendal Museum houses a unique collection of the taxidermy of Henry Murray & Son who lived and worked in Carnforth, near Kendal, arguably the finest in the U.K. and a real jewel in the history of Kendal Town. We decided to publish a second, more detailed book on this collection. Another period of intense photography followed (Figs. 4-5) and six months later, a second volume was published, illustrating the superb quality of the work by H. Murray & Son (Fig. 6). The book also included a fascinating historical introduction to Kendal Museum, which puts into context the collection as it exists today.



Fig. 4. Choosing Murray Cases in the Natural History Store during July 2009.



Fig. 5. Photography of the Murray cases in the Natural History Store during July 2009.

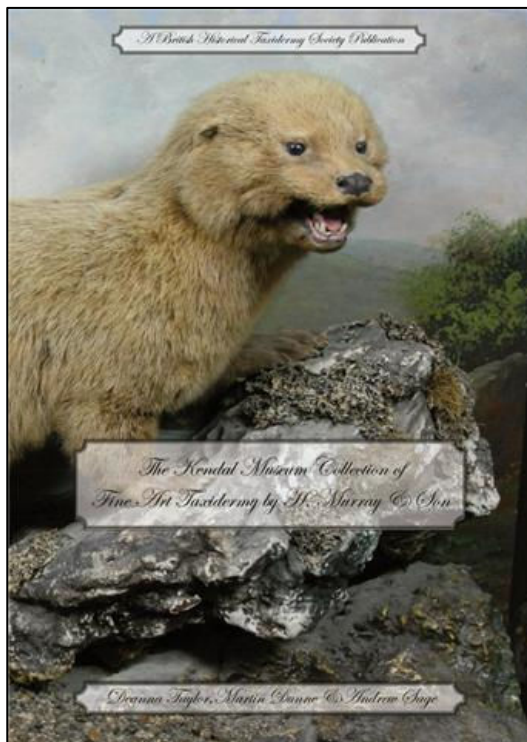


Fig. 6. The cover of the second book: The Kendal Museum Collection of Fine Art Taxidermy by H. Murray & Son.



Fig. 7. Press release photo for the second book. From left to right: Deanna Taylor, BHTS; Graham Wilkinson, Principal of Kendal College; Carol Davies, Curator of Natural History, Kendal Museum; Andrew Sage, BHTS; Martin Dunne, Chairman BHTS; Carl Church, creator of the Dodo model.

The second book was launched at Kendal museum on Oct 23rd 2009 – The event was attended by taxidermists and local natural history and wildlife enthusiasts, as well as local dignitaries and residents. Kendal Museum was delighted to welcome the researchers from the BHTS who had compiled the book over a period of 3 years (Fig. 7). Pat Morris gave a highly entertaining illustration of the changing attitudes to taxidermy and Carl Church, leading bird taxidermist, brought a Dodo model! To capitalise on the publicity of the project, BHTS prepared a series of post cards for sale at the Museum (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. An example from a series of post cards produced by the BHTS for sale at the Museum.

The Dodo rather stole the show and Kendal College with foresight bought it for the Museum thus generating the next project, WHO'S NEXT, a new education program at Kendal Museum generously supported by Renaissance North west. The recently acquired Dodo will form the iconic centerpiece of a new gallery display featuring extinct and endangered species represented in the magnificent collections (Fig. 9) (see Fig. 11 overleaf for image of panel of extinct and endangered birds and animals in Kendal Museum). To support this display there are a number of educational projects, ranging from Key Stage 1 through to college students in training and education. The Dodo was also featured on a promotional T-shirt available for sale in the Museum's shop (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9. Display during preparation, February 2011



Fig. 10. The museum shop merchandise, including the Dodo T-shirt!

EXTINCT AND ENDANGERED ANIMALS AND BIRDS REPRESENTED IN KENDAL MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	REGIONS OF ORIGIN	RED DATA LIST STATUS	POPULATION STATUS
Birds				
Huia	<i>Heteralocha acutirostris</i>	New Zealand	EXTINCT	Last seen 1907
Eskimo Curlew	<i>Numenius borealis</i>	Canada and Alaska	POSSIBLY EXTINCT	Last seen 1980
Black Stilt	<i>Himantopus novaezelandiae</i>	New Zealand	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	c25 adults
Kakapo	<i>Strigops habroptilus</i>	New Zealand	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	124 in 2009
Ivory-billed Woodpecker	<i>Campephilus principalis</i>	Cuba	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	No recent sightings
Red-breasted Goose	<i>Branta ruficollis</i>	Siberia	ENDANGERED	37,000
Nahan's Francolin	<i>Francolinus nahani</i>	Congo and Uganda	ENDANGERED	Under 100,000
North Island Kokaako	<i>Calceus wilsonii</i>	New Zealand	ENDANGERED	Fewer than 1,000
Gouldian Finch	<i>Erythrura gouldiae</i>	Australia	ENDANGERED	2,000-10,000
Southern Cassowary	<i>Casuarius casuarius</i>	Indonesia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Fjordland Penguin	<i>Eudyptes pachyrhynchus</i>	New Zealand	VULNERABLE	A few hundred, declining
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	Spain	VULNERABLE	c120 pairs, increasing
Black Sicklebill	<i>Epimachus fastuosus</i>	New Guinea	VULNERABLE	Unknown, declining
Rufous-necked Hornbill	<i>Acerus nipalensis</i>	Bhutan and indo-China	VULNERABLE	Rapidly declining
Mammals				
Tasmanian Wolf	<i>Thylacinus cynocephalus</i>	Tasmania	EXTINCT	Last seen 1936
Black & white Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata</i>	Madagascar	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Lowland Gorilla	<i>Gorilla gorilla</i>	West Africa	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Black Rhinoceros	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>	Southern Africa	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	Under 2,000
Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>	Asia	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Bornean Orangutan	<i>Pongo pygmaeus</i>	Indonesia and Malaysia	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Tasmanian Devil	<i>Sarcophilus harrisii</i>	Tasmania	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
African Wild Dog	<i>Lycan pictus</i>	Africa	ENDANGERED	3,000 – 5,500
Walia Ibex	<i>Capra walie</i>	Ethiopia	ENDANGERED	c500, increasing
Markhor	<i>Capra falconeri</i>	Pakistan, Afganistan	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Nile Lechwe	<i>Kobus megaceros</i>	Sudan	ENDANGERED	c4,000 decreasing
Eld's Deer	<i>Rucervus eldi</i>	Indo-china	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Indian Buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>	Far East	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Common Chimpanzee	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>	Africa	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Proboscis Monkey	<i>Nasalis larvatus</i>	Indonesia and Malaysia	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Chinese Pangolin	<i>Manis pentadactyla</i>	South East Asia	ENDANGERED	Decreasing
Polar Bear	<i>Ursus maritimus</i>	The Arctic	VULNERABLE	20,000 – 25,000
Mandrill Baboon	<i>Mandrillus sphinx</i>	West Africa	VULNERABLE	Unknown
Hairy Babirusa	<i>Babirusa babirusa</i>	Indonesia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Red Panda	<i>Ailuurus fulgens</i>	Asia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Himalayan Black Bear	<i>Ursus thibetanus</i>	Asia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Nubian Ibex	<i>Capra nubiana</i>	Middle East	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Indian Rhinoceros	<i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i>	India and Nepal	VULNERABLE	Increasing
Swamp Deer	<i>Rucervus duvaucelii</i>	India and Nepal	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Indian Bison	<i>Bos gaurus</i>	Asia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Clarke's Gazelle	<i>Ammodorcas clarkei</i>	East Africa	VULNERABLE	A few thousand
Dorcas Gazelle	<i>Gazella dorcas</i>	North Africa	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Red-fronted Gazelle	<i>Eudorcas rufifrons</i>	Central Africa	VULNERABLE	2,500 decreasing
Soemmerring's Gazelle	<i>Nanger soemmerringii</i>	East Africa	VULNERABLE	c6,000 decreasing
Common Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Africa	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicorn</i>	South East Asia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
African Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	Africa	VULNERABLE	Increasing
Banded Civit	<i>Hemigalus derbyanus</i>	Indonesia and Malaysia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Southern Pig-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>	Indonesia and Malaysia	VULNERABLE	Decreasing
Sooty Mangabey	<i>Cercocebus atys</i>	West Africa	VULNERABLE	Decreasing

INFORMATION FROM IUCN RED DATA LIST 2010

Fig. 11. Display panel of extinct and endangered birds and animals in Kendal Museum.

This is a story of working in partnership; this project, initiated to illustrate the taxidermy collections during a time of adversity, has now resulted in publication, educational programmes and a new permanent display illustrating the unique and priceless natural history heritage held with the Museum collection. It is not finished – a third volume is to be published by the BHTS in conjunction with Kendal Museum and will illustrate the trophy head collection. It is to be launched this year, 2011, and I have a few more ideas yet!

Acknowledgements

The BHTS who, through the generosity of their time, expertise and resources have enabled a lasting record of the taxidermy collections at Kendal museum; Renaissance North West for grant-funding conservation work and the Dodo WHO'S NEXT project at Kendal museum; the dedicated team of volunteers at Kendal museum who have worked on these projects for several years; Kendal College who from 1 April 2009 have managed Kendal Museum as part of a ten-year partnership agreement with South Lakeland District Council; and all our other supporters.

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