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Author(s): Russell, D.

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Book Review

Edward Gerrard & Sons: A Taxidermy Memoir, by P.A. Morris

- Douglas Russell, Curator: Bird Group, The Natural History Museum, Tring

Following on from his 2003 publication ‘*Rowland Ward: Taxidermist to the world*’ Pat Morris has made another excellent contribution to the narrative on historical British Taxidermy. An acknowledged expert in the field, his most recent publication reviews the important London taxidermist’s Edward Gerrard & Sons over their entire 117-year history. Although lacking in primary source literature, the author has succeeded in giving a clear and succinct history of the major aspects of the company. Beginning with a somewhat brief chronological history of the family members and a history of the company and its premises, subsequent chapters shift focus to examine the company’s taxidermic output. The chapter on *Animal furniture* is particularly fascinating and beautifully illustrates the predilection in the 1920’s and 1930’s for somewhat bizarre souvenirs and novel functional household items. Throughout the book the author’s extensive knowledge of taxidermy techniques shines through, conveying both technical and biographical information in an eminently readable fashion. Although historically Edward Gerrard & Sons have always been overshadowed by Rowland Ward, the author emphasises the important contribution and advances Gerrard’s made in the production of articulated skeletons and models. However, The books primary strength is in the profusion of photographs the book contains; including hundreds of images of the company’s taxidermy, as well as portraits, and extracts from catalogues and labels.

Given Edward Gerrard senior’s (1810-1910) long career in The Natural History Museum and Edward Gerrard junior’s (1832-1927) strong links with the same institution, surprisingly little is mentioned of the company’s major importance as dealers of prepared study skins and eggs, concentrating more on their output of display specimens and unusual items. A more in-depth synopsis of the company’s contribution as dealers and specifically Edward Gerrard junior’s work as a natural history agent is an unfortunate omission. The BMNH purchased considerable numbers of important avian specimens through Edward Gerrard junior, including type specimens, rare osteological material, eggs and thousands of study skins from all over the world, acquired by many of the most important collectors of the Victorian and Edwardian age. Those looking for a comprehensive account of the lives and contribution to science of the early Gerrard men may be a little disappointed. However, putting these limitations aside the book is an enthralling read and beautifully illustrated and given the dearth of literature on this intriguing and important subject, this is a very worthy addition to any natural history library.

References: Sharpe, R Bowdler (1906) in *The History of the Collections in the Natural History Departments of the British Museum*. London. Vol. II. p 357-363.

Edward Gerrard & Sons - A Taxidermy Memoir will always be a scarce book as no more than 300 copies will be printed. Copies can be obtained priced £36.00 plus £4 post and packaging from:
 MPM publishing, West Mains, London Road, Ascot SL5 7DG

