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### **George Wombwell's Travelling Menagerie**

In the Aberdeen University Zoology Department Museum we have two skeletons, a tapir and a tiger, that are attributed to George Wombwell's travelling menagerie. Presumably they are from animals that died on visits to the north-east. George Wombwell was a well known 19th century showman - and his menagerie went the length and breadth of the country for many years. I would be interested in knowing if other collections have any of his specimens and if there is any archive of his correspondence, publicity material and so on. I'm sure much of it is ephemeral in local newspapers and so on and there are several accounts of the man that come up on a Google search, but if there is anything in more depth I would appreciate hearing about it, or about any of his showman competitors.

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### **The Remnants Of The Egg Collection Of Henry Fraser Walter** **- The first Emperor penguin egg (*Aptenodytes forsteri*)**

The first Emperor penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) egg recovered is thought to have been brought back during the French South Polar expedition under Jules-Sebastien-Cesar Dumont D'Urville (1790-1842). Two ships, the 'Astrolabe' and the 'Zélée' departed Toulon on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1837 and visited the South Orkney Islands, South Shetland Islands, northwest coast of the Trinity Peninsula, the Orléans Channel and Joinville Island, before returning to Toulon on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1840, having been away for three years and two months. The egg was then purchased in Paris in late 1840 or 1841 by Dr (Sir) Henry Alfred Pitman, who subsequently sold the collection five years later to Henry Fraser Walter of Papplewick Hall, Nottingham (National Antarctic Expedition, Scott et al. 1907).

Contemporary accounts of H. F. Walter's collection are found in 'Great Houses of Nottinghamshire and the County Families' by Leonard Jacks, published in 1881.

"Three or four handsome walnut cabinets form part of the decorative furniture of this apartment. They contain a wonderful collection of birds' eggs—perhaps the best private collection in England. The eggs are arranged in layers of drawers, and are properly named and classified, some attention having been paid to the placing of the different sizes and to the arrangement of colours. Some of the foreign eggs are very beautiful in colour and shape, and there is an almost endless variety, from the tiny pearl-like egg of the humming bird to that of the extinct auk or of the hairy-looking apteryx of New Zealand, a stuffed specimen of which is to be seen outside, in the hall. Eggs of the ostrich, emu, cassowary, and the ova of the alligator are preserved in larger receptacles than the drawers of these cabinets, and two of the eggs of the largest of the feathered tribe have been made into very handsome vases, which form part of the pretty ornamentation of the drawing room"

H. F. Walter was a friend of John Wolley and his collection contained many of his eggs. The collection was bequeathed to his son, John Henry Walter who moved it to Drayton House, Norwich. Here the collection languished in a 'damp room' before being sold on Wednesday the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1912 at No. 38 King Street, Covent Garden in Stevens auction rooms, by which time 'many of the eggs sold were not in good condition' (Chalmers-Hunt and Dance 1976). It is likely that the collection still contained the egg at this point as Edward Wilson saw the egg at Drayton and noted in his 1907 expedition report 'it has been my privilege to examine and compare [the egg] with those from Cape Crozier and I have no doubt, even if there had been any doubt before, that it is the egg of an Emperor penguin'. The sale seems to have included the majority of the collection, alongside two eggs of the Great Auk belonging to Lady Greville Smyth of Ashton Court, Somerset and a series of model great Auk eggs, as well as eggs of the Emperor goose [*Anser canagica*]. The manuscript catalogue of the auction details the sale as follows:

**The collection of Birds' eggs,**  
*Formed by the late H. F. WALTER, Esq., of Papplewick*  
*And others;*

Due to the state of preservation of the collection, it appears that the significance of the egg was already lost; its only likely mention in the sale catalogue is as 'No. 88 Box of Penguins'. Some eggs and an original catalogue are contained in the collection of Norwich Castle museum and some of Walter's specimens also made it to the Natural History Museum (NHM) via Salmon, Gurney and Meiklejohn. However the egg in question seems to have not been officially recorded since the sale of 1912. Since Emperor penguin eggs were not brought back on either the 'Belgica' or 'Southern Cross' expeditions, the rediscovery of this early egg would be, potentially, both historically and scientifically interesting. It seems likely this egg, picked up on an ice-flow on the summer months of 1837-1838 could be presently unrecognised in a museum or private collection.

Chalmers-Hunt, J. M. and S. P. Dance (1976). Natural history auctions 1700-1972: a register of sales in the British Isles. London, Sotheby Parke Bernet.

National Antarctic Expedition, R. F. Scott, et al. (1907). National Antarctic Expedition [of the S.S. "Discovery", under Captain R.F. Scott], 1901-1904: Natural history [including some specimens obtained by G.A. Davidson of the relief ship, the "Morning"]. London, British Museum.

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### **What's Going On In Your Museum?**

Spread the word about news and events in your museum, here in the Newsletter and on our website. Send me information about new exhibitions and learning developments and we can pass this along to the membership. If you are going to a meeting, why not let us know about it and we'll mention it in the Newsletter, and maybe you'd like to send in a few words about it, so that others can benefit as well. This section is very casual, so don't think you'll have to spend days writing a paper! Please just send us in your impressions so we can pass them along. If you've got an issue which might benefit from a bit of advice, then why not post a question on the *Forum* section of our website? If you are interested in helping spread the word about NatSCA, then please contact me. I have some leaflets that can be distributed when you are going to meetings and conferences. This way, we are all kept informed about what's going on, and we can all support and encourage each other when the times are bad, and congratulate each other, and ourselves when times are good!

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