

Disposal Report for Various Cased and Uncased Taxidermy Mounts of British Species Currently Held on Loan by Hampshire Cultural Trust

Introduction

The RCAGM (Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum) is considering the disposal of the above in-line with section 5.4 of its Collection Development Strategy which has identified that some areas of its collection, including natural history, are surplus to requirements and constitute a drain on limited resources.

Section 3.15 of the Collection Development Strategy identifies the natural history material within the RCAGM collections which does not relate to its 'Core Offer'¹ as a disposal priority. Section 5.4 states that all natural history material not acquired by our Founders should be disposed of.

The items under consideration in this report have been on loan to Hampshire Cultural Trust and its predecessor organisations since at least 1977. It is considered sector best practice to review such long-term loans and, where possible and suitable, transfer the material concerned to the ownership of the borrower.

To expedite the situation and to save time this report will deal with this material at a group rather than an individual level as the rationale for disposal is identical and applies universally across the items concerned.

Object Description and Provenance

Please turn to Appendix 1 for details and images of the individual items concerned. All are in good condition and were professionally stuffed and mounted at the time of their creation.

These objects have been on loan to Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) and its predecessor organisations since at least 1977. They have received good care and conservation treatment from HCT down the years, although some have been removed from their original display cases which have been discarded subsequently. All are currently held at the HCT headquarters site at Chilcombe, Winchester. It is understood that they have been displayed, researched, and used in a variety of ways by the borrower down the years.

¹ See Appendix 2 for the full text of the 'Core Offer' of the RCAGM

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to match up all the items subject to this report to specific entries in our accession registers. The information in the accession registers is often too vague to make a connection and when items were de-cased by HCT original RCAGM labelling was lost. As a result, these items are still held on the temporary inventory numbers (T numbers) assigned to them during the Renaissance in the Regions funded inventory project (2003-2010). However, it is possible that they are from one of the identified donations discussed below.

The provenance of those specimens that have known donors is as follows:

- 405.35.98 - Part of a group of 17 cased taxidermy mounts given by the executors of A.H.B. Hartford of Christchurch. Given in 1935 they were held at the RCAGM until 1951 when records indicate that the entire collection was dispersed to other sites, but it is unclear on what basis as there is no corresponding entry in the Loans Register². Three cases were sent to the Red House at Christchurch, and these are the subject of this proposed disposal, and by 1977 they were in the hands of HCT's parent body Hampshire County Museums and Archives Service.
- 426.36.26 - Part of a bequest of a Dr Snell of Winton, Bournemouth, given in 1936 consisting of 51 cased taxidermy mounts of birds with five volumes of 'Birds of the British Isles' by G. Stoneham. Records indicate the two of the cases were destroyed following attack by moth in 9.1942. Like the Hartford collection, 48 of the cases Snell bequest were sent to the Red House Museum³ at Christchurch in 1951. It is members of this subsection of the original bequest that are the subject of this report. By 1977 they were formerly recorded by Hampshire County Museums and Archives Service.
- 500.39.37 - One of a group of four cased taxidermy mounts of birds gifted in 1939 to the RCAGM by a Miss A. Hart of New Milton, Hampshire. Like the above the group was sent to the Red House Museum, Christchurch, in 1951 and it appears to have been in the possession of Hampshire County Museums and Archives Service from 1977 onwards.

Key to the intellectual value of any taxidermy specimen is the quality of the scientific data associated with it. Knowing with a measure of precision where a specimen comes from and when allows researchers to make use of it be it for visual comparison or DNA sampling. The specimens subject to this report are for the most part without much of this data but it can be presumed, with some exceptions, that the majority are from this geographical region.

² It is possible that some of this collection was returned to the RCAGM at some point and destroyed due to pest infestation some time in the 1990s.

³ The Red House Museum, Christchurch, is operated by HCT despite being within the BCP conurbation as it remained in the hands of Hampshire County Museums and Archives Service following the change in the Dorset county border in the 1970s.

Another marker of worth in this branch of natural science is the taxidermist who carried out the work in the specimen. Some taxidermists were so skilled that their work is sought after by collectors for its aesthetic value alone. Three of the taxidermists involved in the creation of some of these specimens are named (see Appendix 1).

Christine Taylor, former natural history curator at HCT - now at Portsmouth City Museums, was asked to comment on the taxidermists involved. She stated that while James Ponchaud and Frederick Stratton were more than competent taxidermists, they were not noteworthy beyond their locales (Christchurch and Hitchin, Bedfordshire respectively). Ashmead and Co. however are represented in the collections of the Natural History Museum, London.

Interestingly, two of the specimens currently on temporary inventory numbers, T9.11.2007.15 and T9.11.2007.18, seem to have originally come from Hurn Court near Christchurch, the family seat of the Earls of Malmesbury. This is probably as the result of a sale of the house's contents in the 1950s-1960s but there is no corresponding accession register entry. Two more, T9.11.2007.20 and T9.11.2007.30, are possibly also from there but the evidence is sadly lacking to be absolutely sure.

The Case for Retention

Meeting the 'Core Offer' of the RCAGM

This material does not fit within the 'Core Offer' of the RCAGM (see below) as these specimens were not collected by our Founders. While Lady Russell-Cotes had an interest in natural history it was canted towards the exotic species that the Russell-Cotes' encountered on their travels, especially in New Zealand.

Relevance to the RCAGM Interpretation Strategy

This material is completely irrelevant to the RCAGM Interpretation Strategy (see below).

Public Benefit

The retention of this material by the RCAGM would not benefit the public in any way as it is already in the care of HCT and fully accessible by the public or researchers.

Effect of Disposal on Remaining Collections

The disposal of this material by the RCAGM would have no detrimental effect on the rest of its collections.

Implications for Public Collections Holding Similar Material

No other public collections in the UK would suffer from the RCAGM disposing of this material. HCT would benefit from a transfer of ownership of this collection by having full control over it. Currently the loan status of this material places restrictions on what HCT can do with it.

The Costs of Retention (Including Conservation)

Currently this material does not place any cost only the RCAGM other than the staff time to manage the loan. This collection is insured and cared for at HCT's expense.

This material does not currently place a financial burden on the RCAGM. However, there could, in theory, be a future cost should HCT ever decide to return it. Most problematically storage space would have to be found for it. It would have to be added to the RCAGM's insurance although that cost would be small as the taxidermy specimens such as these are low value items.

The Case for Disposal

Meeting the 'Core Offer' of the RCAGM

This material does not meet the 'Core Offer' of the RCAGM. It is not associated in any way with Lady Russell-Cotes who did have an interest in natural science. She formed a collection of taxidermy but that was based on non-UK specimens.

Relevance to the RCAGM Interpretation Strategy

This material is not relevant to the RCAGM Interpretation Strategy as it does not meet the 'Core Offer' around which the strategy is based. It is very hard to see any reason why the RCAGM would use this collection in its public programme when we know that Lady Russell-Cotes was primarily interested in non-UK species, especially New Zealand birds.

Public Benefit

The RCAGM is not benefitting the public in any way by retaining this collection. The RCAGM is not a natural history museum, and it is not perceived as such by the visiting public or researchers.

Effect of Disposal on Remaining Collections

The disposal of this collection by the RCAGM would have no detrimental effect on the rest of its collections.

Implications for Public Collections Holding Similar Material

No other museums/collections in the UK would suffer from the RCAGM disposing of this collection. If the collection was transferred to HCT they would benefit from secure ownership over it.

The Costs of Disposal

The cost of disposing of this collection would be minimal and of the usual amount one would expect to see as part of the disposal process. There is no grant aid or funding to be repaid.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The disposal of this type of material is indicated in the RCAGM's Collection Development Strategy under section 5.4. This material lacks relevance to the RCAGM and its current activities which are based around its 'Core Offer'. The RCAGM is interested only in retaining that natural science material which compliments its 'Core Offer' i.e. material which was, or is similar to, that collected by Lady Russell-Cotes.

If HCT were ever to discontinue the loan of this collection and return it to us it is hard to see how it would ever been displayed in the RCAGM or as part of its public programme and it would add considerably to existing storage pressures. Such material is much better in the hands of an organisation specifically interested in and dedicated to natural history and is able to cope with its specialist collection care needs.

Therefore, this report recommends that this collection is disposed of by transfer to HCT which has expressed an informal but strong interest in retaining and using it.



Sector best practice and the RCAGM's own procedures regarding disposals mandate that all disposals should be advertised to the wider museum community prior via the Museums Association's website and the Museums Journal. This will allow any museum or public collection to express an interest. However, given the long-standing loan status of this material formal contact should be established with HCT and the specimens offered to them as a transfer.




Duncan Walker MA, AMA



Curator, RCAGM



Appendices



Appendix 1 - Listing of Taxidermy Held on Loan at Hampshire Cultural Trust Subject to this Report




Accession No. (or equivalent)	Description	Provenance	Image
:405.35.98.1	A taxidermied Shoveller (<i>Anas clypeata</i>), mounted in a case, prepared by James Ponchaud of Christchurch, Dorset, 1890-1915. The specimen is a male and is mounted facing left on simulated coarse, wet sand. Case glazed on three sides and decorated with <i>Juncus articulatus</i> , <i>Juncus effusus</i> and <i>Juncus inflexus</i> and grasses. Background uniform mauve.	Gift of the executors of the late of A.H.B. Hartford of Christchurch, 1935.	
:405.35.98.3	A cased taxidermy mount of a male Eider (<i>Somateria mollissima</i>). The case is decorated with a marine theme.	Gift of the executors of the late of A.H.B. Hartford of Christchurch, 1935.	




:405.35.98.4	A cased taxidermy mount of a female Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>). The display case shows the specimen on simulated mud.	Gift of the executors of the late of A.H.B. Hartford of Christchurch, 1935.	
:426.36.26.3	A group of taxidermied birds mounted in a display case. The group consists of some Great Grey Shrike, <i>Lanius excubitor</i> (four specimens) and Red Backed Grey Shrike, <i>Lanius collurio</i> (two specimens).	Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.	
:426.36.26.4	A taxidermy mount, uncased, of a Great Bustard (<i>Otis tarda</i>), female, shot in Dorset, 1858. Formerly cased with a male.	Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.	




:426.36.26.5	A taxidermy mount, uncased, of a Great Bustard, <i>Otis tarda</i> , male, shot Dorset, 1858. Formerly cased with a female.	Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.	
:426.36.26.6	A group of taxidermied birds mounted in a display case. The group consists of a Blackbird (<i>Turdus merula</i>), a Greenfinch (<i>Carduelis chloris</i>), a Chaffinch (<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>), a Brambling (<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>) and a Bullfinch (<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>). The taxidermy mounts were prepared by Stratton of Railway Street, Hitchin, Hertfordshire. Male Blackbird mounted centre facing left. To left, Brambling above mounted facing left, male Blackbird below mounted facing right. To right Greenfinch mounted facing right. Above male Chaffinch mounted in flight about to	Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.	




	<p>alight on perch. All specimens mounted on lichen covered blackthorn twigs attached centrally to make a bush. Case decorated with the grass <i>Briza media</i>, bracken, two species of moss, heather, and a further grass species <i>Agrostis</i> sp. Simulated sand between decoration. Case glazed on three sides, the background uniform sky blue.</p>		
:426.36.26.8	<p>A taxidermy case containing a taxidermied male and female Goosander (<i>Mergus merganser</i>). Male bird mounted facing left to left of female which is mounted sitting right, but facing left towards the male. Base simulated damp sand. Female sitting on a sandstone rock 18cm higher than the male. Case is decorated with leaves of reed, <i>Juncus articulatus</i> and another grass species. Background painted as a cloudy sky.</p>	<p>Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.</p>	
:426.36.26.10	<p>A cased taxidermy mount of a Hoopoe (<i>Upupa epops</i>). The bird is mounted facing left on a block of simulated wood with Lesser Gorse (<i>Ulex minor</i>). Background white. Case glazed on three sides.</p>	<p>Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.</p>	




:426.36.26.11	A taxidermy case containing a group of birds. The group consists of a Starling (<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>), a Blackbird (<i>Turdus merula</i>), a Redwing (<i>Turdus iliacus</i>), a Ring Ouzel (<i>Turdus torquatus</i>), a Fieldfare (<i>Turdus pilaris</i>), a Song Thrush (<i>Turdus philomelos</i>), a Mistle Thrush (<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>).	Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.	
:426.36.26.12	A cased taxidermy mount of two of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers (<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>). Birds mounted on either side of a branch, mounted inwards but facing outwards. Case decorated with two grass species, bracken, lichens and a moss species. Case glazed on three sides, background uniform blue.	Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.	



:426.36.26.14	A taxidermy case containing a mounted group of owls. The group consists of three Barn Owl (<i>Tyto alba</i>) specimens, three Eagle Owl (<i>Bubo bubo</i>) specimens, a Little Owl (<i>Athene noctua</i>), two Long Eared Owl (<i>Asio otus</i>) specimens, two Hawk Owl (<i>Surnia ulula</i>) specimens, two Scops Owl (<i>Otus scops</i>) specimens, three Short Eared Owl specimens, two Tawny Owl (<i>Strix aluco</i>) specimens, two Tengmalm's Owl (<i>Aegolius funereus</i>) specimens, two Snowy Owl (<i>Nyctea scandiaca</i>) specimens. Case decorated with grasses, ferns, mosses, lichens etc. background pale blue.	Bequest of Dr S.H. Snell of Bournemouth, 1936.	
:500.39.37.4	A taxidermy mount, uncased (formerly cased), of an Arctic Skua (<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>).	Gift of Miss A. Hart of New Milton, 1939.	
:T9.11.2007.3	A cased taxidermy mount of two pheasants, a Reeve's Pheasant (<i>Syrnaticus reevesii</i>) and a Golden Pheasant (<i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>).	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	

:T9.11.2007.4	A cased taxidermy mount of two Hawk Owl specimens (<i>Surnia ulula</i>), prepared by Ashmead and Co., 35 Bishopsgate, London.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
:T9.11.2007.5	A taxidermy mount, uncased, of a Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>).	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
:T9.11.2007.6	A taxidermy mount, uncased, of a Willow Warbler (<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>).	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	

:T9.11.2007.7	A taxidermy mount, uncased, of a Grasshopper Warbler (<i>Locustella naevia</i>). Originally identified as a Spotted Flycatcher.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
:T9.11.2007.8	A taxidermy mount, uncased, of a Grasshopper Warbler (<i>Locustella naevia</i>).	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
:T9.11.2007.10	A cased taxidermy mount of a Slavonian Grebe (<i>Podiceps auritus</i>). It is in winter plumage mounted facing left, Base of case decorated with bryozoa, the rest covered with a fine sand. The background is a colourwash, pale sky blue above, pale pink below. Possibly the specimen recorded 'Dec 28th, 1827. Killed a beautiful specimen of the Dusky Grebe on the Moor's River.' Referenced in 'Half a Century of Sport in Hampshire', 1905, by F.F. Aflalo published by The Country Life Library of Sport.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	

:T9.11.2007.18	A cased taxidermy mount of a Guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>) which was knocked down by the Honourable Charles Harris (afterwards Bishop of Gibraltar - the third son of James Edward Harris, 2nd Earl of Malmesbury) with a riding whip near Boscombe, Dorset, 11.1827. The bird is mounted in the case facing left. Case decorated with bryozoa, sand and a single mussel shell. The background painted as a blue to pink colourwash.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
:T9.11.2007.20	A taxidermy case containing a Goosander (<i>Mergus merganser</i>), dated to the late 19 th or early 20 th century. The specimen is a male bird mounted facing right on alga covered chalk rocks. The case decorated with seaweeds, grasses used in decoration and a dead composite flowering plant. Background painted white except for a continuation of the grasses used in decoration which are painted on.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
:T9.11.2007.29	A taxidermy case containing a Harlequin duck (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) dated to the late 19 th or early 20 th century.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	

:T9.11.2007.30	A taxidermy case containing an albino Wheatear (<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>), dated to the late 19th or early 20th century.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
: T9.11.2007.31	A taxidermy case containing two Stone Curlew (<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>) specimens. The case decorated with sand, grass (<i>Aira praecox</i>) and small stones	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
: T9.11.2007.37	A taxidermy mount, uncased, of a Little Owl (<i>Athene alba</i>). The specimen is mounted on a branch attached to a moss-covered wooden base, would have been cased originally.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	

:T9.11.2007.38	A taxidermy case containing two specimens of Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>), one adult and one juvenile, dated to 1890-1910. Both the adult and the immature bird are mounted on simulated rock.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	
:T9.11.2007.41	A taxidermy mount of a Water Rail (<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>). Would have been cased formerly.	Recorded as found in store, 2007.	

Appendix 2 - The RCAGM Statement of Purposes - Our Core Offer

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum is an outstanding celebration of late-Victorian art collectors; their passions and achievements; how they lived and encountered the world; and how they presented their collections to enrich the lives of others.

We are entrusted to present the Russell-Cotes' personal vision and legacy in the most authentic way possible, and to enable learning, enjoyment and access to the house and collections for residents and visitors to Bournemouth.

The 'core offer' is focused on the historic building, East Cliff Hall, its stunning seafront setting, and its internationally-known collections, which attract and astound visitors. However, this is only part of the offer. In addition to the original house, we also have four art galleries added in the early 1900s. We will use this offer to:

1. Explain the story of the Russell-Cotes, the Victorian/Edwardian house and world cultures/art collections, putting it into local, national and international context
2. Encourage use of the galleries, collections, and unique energy and atmosphere of the house to inspire great art, and to stimulate creativity and curiosity
3. Explore aspects of the human condition, which were recognised by the Victorian innovators, philanthropists and social reformers, and which matter to communities today.

Finally, the spaces available at Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum are not the exclusive domain of the Victorians. We are developing a vibrant cultural programme which, while rooted in the era of our founders, will be a stage for wider participation and engagement. We will continue in the spirit of two of Bournemouth's most forward-thinking citizens by striving to make a significant contribution to the development of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum as a cultural flagship for Bournemouth. (MBTS, 2012)

We want our art gallery and museum to do what the very best galleries and museums do: to be spaces where the past, present and future come together in an irresistible mix of life, culture and heritage - a place where everyone can feel at home with a world of art.