

THE EARLIEST (1805) UNPUBLISHED DRAWINGS OF
THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE UPPER MANDIBLE OF
THE WOODCOCK'S BILL.¹

BY HENRY MOUSLEY.

Two factors are responsible for the present paper, the author's fortunate engagement compiling a general catalogue of the 5,000 original drawings and paintings of mammals, birds, insects and flowers, etc., in the Blacker and Emma Shearer Wood Libraries of McGill University, and his early fondness for matters appertaining to Woodcock lore, without which, the drawings presently to be discussed, would probably never have been specifically noticed. Already, these famous collections have produced pictures of more than passing interest, some of which have already been described by the Librarian, Dr. Gerhard Lomer,² Dr. Casey Wood,³ Dr. Alexander Wetmore,⁴ and the writer.⁵

It was whilst examining these drawings, many of which are contained in albums or books, that the writer came across an old volume containing 310 drawings and sketches by George Cumberland, many of which are most beautifully finished. On the front page of this volume is the following inscription:

"This volume of 310 studies from nature, in various branches of natural history the amusement of many pleasant hours of his father George Cumberland—he presents to his son Sydney, as a proof of his esteem and as an example of vacant hours, not mispent.

June 28th, 1846. G. Cumberland.

G. Cumberland was born 27th November, 1754, died August 8th, 1848. Sydney Cumberland died March, 1868."

¹ Read before the American Ornithologists' Union, Semicentennial Anniversary, New York, Nov. 15, 1933.

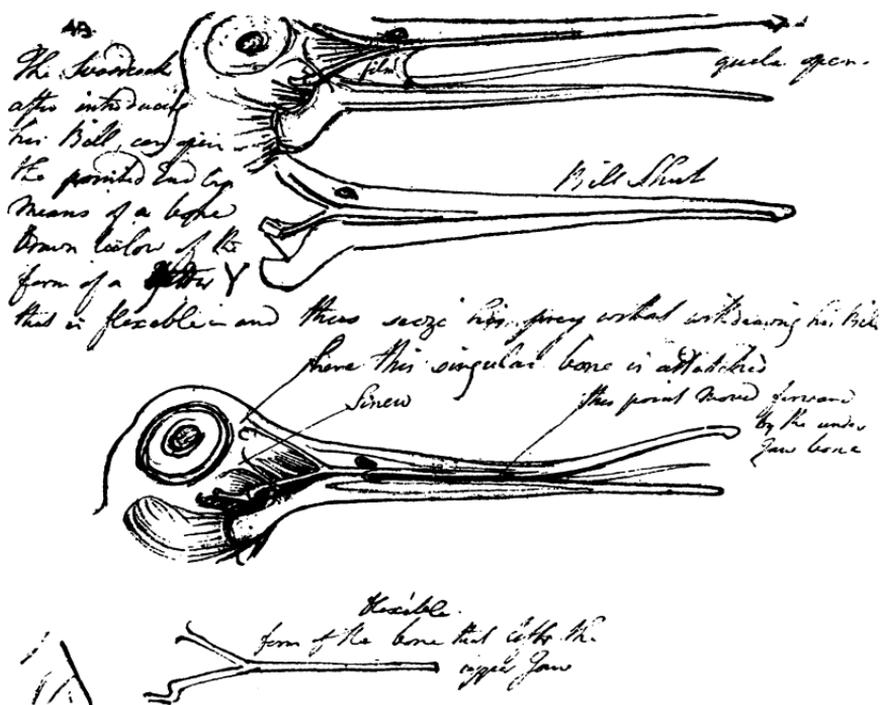
² Feather pictures of the *Commedia Dell'Arte*, by Gerhard R. Lomer, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Sept. 1930.

³ *Lady Elizabeth Gwillim—Artist and Ornithologist*, by Casey A. Wood, *Ibis*, July, 1925. Two hitherto unpublished pictures of the Mauritius Dodo, by Casey Wood, *Ibis*, Oct. 1927.

⁴ *The Rablé Paintings of Haitian Birds*, by Alexander Wetmore, *Auk*, Oct. 1930.

⁵ *Catalogue of Original Paintings of Birds*, selected from the Emma Shearer Wood Library, McGill University, by Henry Mousley, A.O.U. Meeting, Quebec, 1932.

As will be noticed, the father was ninety-two years old when he presented the book to his son, just two years before his death, the signature naturally being in a somewhat shaky hand.



Many of the drawings are colored, ranging in date from 1798 to 1830, whilst others again, are merely pen and ink, or pencil sketches, all, however, more or less highly finished, and embracing almost every subject under the sun, from elephants to the eyes of birds, accompanied, for the most part, with explanatory notes. All of the drawings were pasted in the book, but not numbered, and it was whilst doing this, that my attention was drawn to those of the Woodcock, Nos. 49, 49a, 52 and 112, none of which, however, is signed, or dated, but from the style of the writing, and kind of paper used, the most important one, No. 49, depicting the flexibility of the upper mandible of the Woodcock's bill, may safely be ascribed, I think, to between 1802 and 1805, as it agrees in all respects with some of the other drawings of this period,

which are either signed, or dated. From the moment I realized the early date of the drawing, I knew I had made a "find" so to speak, as the discovery of the flexibility of the upper mandible of the Woodcock's bill, has apparently been attributed to Gurdon Trumbull in 1890! whereas, the present drawing clearly proves that Cumberland knew about it in 1805 and as we shall see later, Naumann, in 1799, a matter of 91 years earlier! From information kindly furnished me by Mr. Lawrence Binyon of the British Museum, through Messrs. Wheldon and Wesley of London, from whom the book of drawings was purchased by Dr. Casey Wood in 1925, we learn:—that "George Cumberland was born in 1754. He was a cousin of Richard Cumberland the dramatist, and was employed at the Royal Exchange Assurance Office. He studied at the Royal Academy School as an amateur at the same time as Flaxman. Very likely it was through Flaxman that he got to know William Blake, the poet and artist. He became one of Blake's best friends and Blake helped him with the technique of etching. According to Farington's Diary, Vol. 1, he had about £500 pounds a year left him and ran away with a Mrs. Cooper, wife of an architect with whom he lodged. He compromised the matter with Cooper in Paris for one thousand pounds. He published 'Thoughts on Outline,' in 1796, and an album containing 221 drawings, which is in the British Museum, and which includes some of the designs engraved in that work. He also published lithographic views of Italy 1821. The copy of Blake's book 'Europe,' in the British Museum, contains quotations in what has recently been discovered to be Cumberland's writing; and there are letters of his in the Ms. Department of the Museum. In middle life Cumberland went to live in Bristol. He died in 1848. This, which is not all to be found in one book, about sums up what is at present known about Cumberland." I might add, however, that his having resided at Bristol for a time, accounts for the number of sketches the album contains of animals and birds in the Zoological Gardens at Clifton, near Bristol, which brings vividly to the memory of the writer many happy hours spent in those same gardens—whilst pursuing his early academic studies at Clifton College—the grounds of which practically adjoined those of the Zoo, being separated only by a turn-pike road.

Now, as I have already remarked, Cumberland, seems to have had an aptitude for drawing everything under the sun, just as the particular subject appealed to him at the moment, or took his fancy, nevertheless, it does seem strange he should have alighted on a subject that no one knew anything about at the time, unless, being a German scholar, he had read Naumann's 'Naturgeschichte der Vogel des nordlichen Deutschlands,' of 1799, or Supplement of 1804, wherein the flexibility of the tip of the upper mandible of the Woodcock's bill is recorded for the first time. On reading this, Cumberland's love of investigation would naturally be aroused, and he probably proceeded to investigate for himself, not only, the flexibility of the bill, but also, other parts of the Woodcock's anatomy, which would account for the subsequent drawing of the gizzard—which drawing by the way is on the reverse side of that of the bill—together with the separate ones of the head and eyes, also. No matter from what angle the matter is viewed, the fact stands out, that Cumberland's drawing is the very first one to depict the tip of the upper mandible in a raised position, with a description of how this is effected, even if the drawing was made at a later date than 1805—as I have assumed—say after 1811, when Nitzsch's drawing appeared in his 'Osteografische Beitrage zur Naturgeschichte der Vogel,' a drawing which neither depicts the upraised tip of the bill, or how it might be accomplished, for the very simple reason, as Nitzsch afterwards says in 1816, that the mode of the jaw movement of this species was unknown to him when his drawing was made, and since it was not until 1867, that another one appeared—showing the raised tip and mode of working—that of Hoffman's, it cannot be said that Cumberland derived his information from it, seeing that he died in 1848, or just nineteen years previous to the appearance of Hoffman's work.

No doubt, what has been said regarding the drawing of the bill, may apply equally well to those of the gizzard and under part of the head; the head with "feeler" (the cornu of the hyoid); and the eye; as doubtless they represent the very first drawings of these parts of a Woodcock's anatomy. In conclusion, it may be stated that the present short paper is an abstract, only, of a much longer one the writer has in preparation, embracing a review of all the literature on the subject of the peculiar habits and anatomy

of the European Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) and the American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*) from the earliest times to the present day.

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