

Lyon & Turnbull to sell mystery dog today



A very unusual stuffed dog called Mavis is to be sold at Lyon & Turnbull, however the breed of the dog has auctioneers baffled. Valued at up to £2-3,000, the dog is to be sold at Lyon & Turnbull on the 20th July 2013.

“This is one of the most unusual items we have ever sold at auction” said Theo Burrell, Antiques Specialist at Lyon & Turnbull. She continued “I have tried in vain to identify the breed; it may have been a Newfoundland or perhaps a Pyrenean Mountain Dog. All the current owner knows is that it was once a beloved family pet and the owners could not bear being parted from it when she died and they had her preserved.”

Taxidermy is a skill and art form that many think is a bit strange, even though it was practiced by luminaries like Charles Darwin and Theodore Roosevelt. Other unusual animals to be treated to the art of taxidermy included The Platypus. In 1798, when Captain John Hunter sent a platypus pelt along with a sketch of the animal to England, British scientists thought they knew a hoax when they saw it. George Shaw, who was Keeper of the Department of Natural History at the British Museum, wrote up a description of the creature based on the pelt and Hunter’s notes in *Naturalist’s Miscellany*, but said he could not be certain that such a peculiar beast existed in nature.

In 1731, the Bey of Algiers gifted King Frederik I of Sweden a real, live lion—along with another big cat, three hyenas, and

a freed slave to serve as their keeper. The lion lived out its days in Djurgården, the royal game park, and when it died, the hope was that the Bey's gift could live on as a stuffed monument to the lion's power. Sadly, the taxidermist had never seen a lion with his own eyes and had, it seems, only a loose idea of how a lion was meant to look. The result, with its lolling tongue and goggly eyes, was something that looked better prepared for a nightmarish cartoon than the royal halls.

Not all taxidermy ends up in the Hall of Mammals by chance; some animals got there because they had a nasty habit of eating people. The infamous Tsavo man eaters were a pair of maneless male lions who haunted the Tsavo River in Kenya where, in 1898, construction crews were building a railroad bridge. According Lt. Col. John Henry Patterson, who eventually killed the lions, they killed and ate ten people—though other reports put the number at 24. There are a variety of theories as to why these two turned to human flesh: they may have previously scavenged dead humans from passing slave caravans; they may have been attracted by cremations of deceased rail workers; they may have poor hunters unable to catch tougher prey. After Patterson killed them, the lions were immortalized twice: once by the Field Museum in Chicago, which paid \$5,000 for the specimens, and once in the 1996 film *The Ghost and the Darkness*, in which Val Kilmer played Patterson.