

GEORGE EDWARD LODGE

3rd December 1860 – 5th February 1954

By The Tryon and Moorland Gallery 1989

George Lodge was born at Horncastle in Lincolnshire, one of a family of eleven children. From an early age he and his brother R.B. Lodge, the pioneer bird photographer, were keen naturalists, roaming the local countryside in search of subjects.

Lodge's enthusiasm was for birds; he had been collecting and skinning specimens since the age of twelve and always maintained that it was impossible to draw the outside of a bird correctly without an intimate acquaintance of the inside.

He was sent to the Lincoln College of Art, where he was awarded fourteen prizes for drawing, and was then apprenticed to a wood engraver. At this he became extremely expert, and one can find some very fine examples of his engraving in such books as J.G. Millais's *Breath from the Veldt 1899* and *Game Birds and Shooting Sketches 1892*.

Falconry was his favourite sport, and whilst he lived in London he often carried a hawk on this fist. He considered it was the best place to 'man' a hawk, for if it became used to everything it saw there, it would be most amenable in the country.

As a young man he travelled widely and went round the world visiting such countries as Japan, Ceylon and the West Indies. He was a great sportsman and much enjoyed his annual visits to Scotland, and to the salmon rivers of Norway, from which countries he gathered so much material for his works on birds of prey.

Lodge was far more interested in painting pictures than in illustrating scientific books. However, as the latter were numerous and necessary he would have them contain as much art as possible in order to "offset some of the extreme crudities of science". That, at least, was his philosophy. It was, however, his wish to illustrate a complete book on British Birds and this was fulfilled with the publication of David Bannerman's *Birds of the British Isles*, 12 volumes, 1953-63. For Lodge this must have been the accumulation of many years' work for by 1946 he had already completed 330 plates. Some time after having completed the proposed 384 plates depicting 426 different species, he asked permission of the publishers to include five extra plates. By this time he had lost the sight of one eye and it was with some trepidation that they awaited the results. However, they need not have worried, for as David Bannerman said in his introduction to volume 5, in which the plates were reproduced, "in his ninety – second year and with one eye impaired, his brush had not lost its delicate touch". It is interesting to note that it was not until his ninetieth birthday that he decided to date his pictures.

At the age of eighty-five he wrote his only book *Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist* in which he gives his most interesting observations of bird painting and explains his reasons for his main choice of painting medium – tempera. He was personally elusive and even from his *Memoirs* one learns few facts about his life. However, we know that he lived for 35

years in London and that towards the end of his life he moved to Camberley where he built a house which he appropriately named Hawk House.

David Bannerman, when writing George Lodge's obituary in *The Ibis*, said of him "George Lodge was a wonderful example of the best which Britain can produce, a sportsman, a naturalist and a very fine gentleman. No one could meet him without feeling the kindliness of his nature and his great integrity, and all who came in contact with him learned to love and admire him".

George Lodge was a foremost authority on the birds of prey and was unquestionably at his best when painting these subjects. He was an active member of the Old Hawking Club at their meetings on Salisbury Plain as early as 1890.