

GEORGE EDWARD LODGE
December 1860 – February 1954

**Written for an exhibition of paintings by George Lodge at the Moorland Gallery
29th March – 21st April 1977**

It must be close on seventy years ago that George Lodge and the writer of this Foreword met for the first time in the Bird-Room of the Natural History Museum, when he was visiting his friend Bill Ogilvie-Grant, then Deputy Keeper of the bird collections. I was but recently down from Cambridge and a great deal of water has run under the bridge since then. Lodge was twenty-six years my senior and I knew him to be ranked with Archibald Thorburn as a master-painter of birds; indeed that great artist admitted that, as a portrayer of Birds of Prey, George Lodge had no equal. His Game Birds were to my mind in the same category as exemplified by his plates in Beebee's magnificent *Monograph of the Pheasants*. Like so many great artists he never received the appreciation due to him until after his death.

I have been asked to write about my friend as a man rather than a bird-artist, for that side of his life has been dealt with in Forewords to earlier exhibitions of his art in the Moorland and Tryon Galleries. His interests were all bound up with his love of Nature, for George Lodge was above all a naturalist, loving the wild places in the Highlands of Scotland and the forests and rivers of Norway from which he derived so much inspiration for his pictures, the backgrounds of which strictly interpret the habitat of his bird-subjects. He loved the chalk-cliffs of Sussex where he spent many days watching peregrine falcons and the sea-fowl of the cliffs but was equally at home painting in the Camberley woods close to his own studio, appropriately named Hawk House.

Several memorable visits to his home in company with my wife gave me glimpses of the simplicity of his life as old age was creeping on, but had little effect on his spirit or the welcome his friends received. Sitting with him in his garden after a happy hour examining the treasures in his studio, we were amazed to see how he was welcomed by the inmates of his garden who gathered round as soon as he appeared; robins, chaffinches, tits and the ubiquitous house sparrows perched on his knees, hat and the arms of his chair as he produced from his old sporting jacket a packet of meal-worms - ! One day at the height of the War, I took with me to Camberley the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (later F.M. Lord Alanbrooke) for I sensed how well the two men would get on together and was not disappointed. Browsing among Lodge's lovely painting in his studio and admiring the beautifully mounted birds (all prepared with his own hands for he was a master of Taxidermy) the C.I.G.S temporarily forgot the War and his own tremendous responsibility and returned to London refreshed in body and mind. Those who may have read Lord Alanbrooke's Foreword to Volume 1 *Birds of the British Isles* and his generous reference to the small part George Lodge and I took in contributing to his "sanctuary of nature" during the last War, will appreciate what that day in the country had done for him.

The difference in our ages prevented any close intimacy between Lodge and oneself; he had countless friends and when writing a few words about my partner in the fifth volume of our joint work – he died before it was published on the 23rd February 1954 – I expressed the hope that one of his contemporaries (Captain Gilbert Blaine, for example or Harry Savory) would publish an account of his life, his art, his travels, his knowledge and love of Falconry and his devotion to birds, but the challenge was never taken up. It would have made fascinating reading.

I have been requested to describe in this Foreward how the 12 volume *Birds of the British Isles* came to be written. I was engaged at the time in writing *The Birds of Tropical West Africa* on behalf of the Colonial Office, and had invited Lodge to prepare a number of the plates of Africa's most brilliant birds; his original paintings for that 8-volume work now adorn the walls of the Librarian's room in the Commonwealth Office and during that collaboration George Lodge often expressed his desire to paint "every bird on the British List"; a gigantic task to contemplate! Although at this date, I forget the details, I must have cashed in upon his wish to illustrate such a work for in a letter to me dated 23rd February 1942 he wrote "Your idea of us two collaborating in a book on British Birds does appeal to me rather strongly. As you say I have always wanted to identify myself with a book on the subject, and I now look upon it in rather this light – that the time has come when I might find myself with the leisure to be getting on with such an idea... I am getting old, having gone eighty-one, but I do not think that my work is deteriorating yet. If such a book could be completed with your name as writer and mine as illustrator, I am sure that it would at once become a best seller." All Lodge's hopes were gratified. In London an exhibition of the original paintings was held in Roland Ward's famous premises in Piccadilly and was opened by Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke. At Lodge's special request the cost of the book was kept low to be within the reach of all who wished to buy it. At his wish a Trust was formed, in April 1944, for the publication of our joint book and similar original works in Natural History. It was named the George Lodge Trust of which Sir John, now Lord Erskine of Rerrick, G.B.E. and myself are the only survivors of the original four. The former resigned in 1964 on his appointment as Governor of Northern Ireland. The Trust is administered in Edinburgh (Chairman General Sir Phillip Christison Bt., G.B.E.) and numbers among its members today Dr. W. J. Eggeling, C.B.E., former Director of Conservancy (Scotland) and Mr. Donald Watson, the distinguished bird-artist. The trustees are planning to publish a small memorial volume of Lodge's best pictures from *Birds of the British Isles* in the near future, the sales proceeds from which will go to support the object of the Trust which Lodge had founded and to which he had bequeathed £5,000.

George Lodge published only one book written and illustrated by himself *Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist* (1946) but the 16 colour plates were reproduced at a most unfortunate time when suitable paper for the purpose was unobtainable. The reproductions in consequence quite failed to do justice to the originals. In his text the author gives us his views "on painting birds" and devotes many pages to the art of hawking to which he was so devoted, and to life sketches of his favourite birds.

There is much else which could be written about George Lodge of whose personality these notes give but a glimpse. Those who had the opportunity of knowing him well will recall his extreme modesty, the warmth of his heart and his kindness to all who sought his advice. It was a joy to be counted among his friends, and an honour to have collaborated with him.

David Bannerman
24th February 1977