

# EDWIN HOLLIS FZS (1863–1941): SOME NOTES ON HIS EARLY LIFE AND ACTIVITIES AS A NATURALIST

Edwin Hollis was born in Paddington, London, into a family that had a long history in the butchery business, and between 1881 and 1901 he worked as a pork butcher. After a brief visit to Canada in 1901–1902, during which he collected specimens of mammals for the British Museum (Natural History), Hollis resumed his trade in London but he seems to have sold his business at the end of 1904. For a few years, Edwin and Annie Hollis lived in Exeter where he took much more interest in natural history, until March 1908 when the couple moved to Aylesbury after his appointment as Curator of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society's new museum.

Between July 1901 and April 1902, Edwin Hollis collected mammals in the Touchwood Hills, Saskatchewan, Canada (Houston 1989a, 1989b). In August 1902, he published an article in *The Zoologist* about 'Collecting small mammals in N.W. T. Canada', listing 22 species. This is the earliest indication of Hollis's interest in natural history. A little over five years later he was among the 41 candidates including 'broken-down school masters, a book-seller, a sculptor, an insurance-agent and poultry farmer' (Gowing 1961, 83) for the post of resident curator of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society's Museum in Aylesbury. Hollis was the successful candidate, 'a choice which was to prove a most fortunate one' (*ibid.*). Recent histories of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (Viney 1996) and of the Society's Museum (Gowing 1961) provided no details of Hollis's career before his appointment, although Viney (1996) characterized him as a 'natural historian [*sic*] with a wide knowledge in other fields[, a] man of great charm and an inspiring teacher [who] encouraged school visits.'

Edwin Hollis was born on 22 January 1863 in Paddington, London. His father, also Edwin Hollis (died 7 October 1890), was a Master Butcher who had his butchery business at 6 Albion Place in Paddington. In the English census for 1861, his

wife, Anne (née Catt), is also designated as a butcher. By 1871, the family consisted of Joseph (aged 10), Edwin (aged 8), Edith (aged 6) and Jessie (aged 5), Alice (aged 4), Harry (aged 2) and Ash (11 months). At the time of the 1881 census, Edwin junior had become the manager of his widowed aunt's (Mrs Mary Elizabeth Hollis) butcher's shop at 283 Oxford Street, London: James Hollis of Wootton, Bedfordshire, had established this business at least by 1854 (Anonymous 1854), possibly earlier. Edwin's father, who in 1881 was described as a 'Retired Gentleman Income derived from Business in other lands', and mother lived at 15 Blandford Square, Marylebone. Also at that address on census day were Joseph, aged 20, a corporal in the 13th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers, and two children born since 1871: Kathleen (aged 9) and Hugh (aged 7).

A decade afterwards, the census returns show that Edwin had married; his wife, Anne (or Annie) Edith (née Thorne; born 1870) was 20 years old and was a native of St Pancras. They had married in Lewisham in the summer of 1890 and on Census Day, 5 April 1891, were living at 399 Oxford Street. He was designated as a 'pork butcher'.

The 1901 census was taken on 31 March. Annie and Edwin Hollis were living at 1 Thomas Street, Hanover Square. However, on 6 June they sailed on Allen Line's *Tunisian* from Liverpool bound for Montreal, Canada. Their destination was given in the ship's manifest 'to Qu'Appelle N. W. T. [North-west Territories]'. Whether their intention was to emigrate and establish their home in Canada cannot be determined, but between 7 July 1901 and 23 April 1902 Annie and Edwin Hollis were guests of his eldest brother, Joseph, who had arrived in Canada at Easter 1884 and had eventually decided to homestead in the Touchwood Hills, 80 miles north of Qu'Appelle. During those late summer, winter and early spring months, Edwin Hollis 'occupied [his] spare time collecting small mammals for the British Museum' (Hollis 1902)

and his wife seems to have painted the same creatures: the mammals ranged from a coyote (see Seton 1909, 789–790) to a shrew, as well as two species of bats (see Seton 1909, 1184, 1192). The couple must have returned to England without much delay after April 1902, for Hollis's article about his collections was issued in *The Zoologist* on 15 August 1902. The British Museum (Natural History) (now the Natural History Museum), London, received 102 specimens from Hollis; Thomas (1906, 38) stated that these were 'the first modern specimens received by the Museum from this region.'

No information can be traced to indicate that Hollis had any formal scientific training, his family's trade perhaps being sufficient to allow him to kill and prepare specimens for museums.

On returning from Canada it is most likely that Hollis resumed working as a butcher in London. In *The London Gazette* on 11 October 1904, Hollis and his brother-in-law, Walter Thorne, gave notice that their partnership with one Lionel George Ross was dissolved by mutual consent. This notice confirms that Hollis, Thorne and Ross had carried on business as 'Pork Butchers and Sausage Makers at No. 399, Oxford-street', and at other premises called the Davhol Works in Acton Vale, under the name 'Davies and Hollis'. Less than three months later, Hollis and Thorne mutually agreed to dissolve their partnership, and announced in *The London Gazette* on 27 January 1905 that the business of the firm of Davies and Hollis would 'in future be carried on by other persons ...'. Thus, having abandoned the butchery trade and sausage-making, Edwin Hollis evidently embarked on a new career and, with his wife, moved out of London.

We cannot trace any further records of Edwin and Annie Hollis until December 1905 when he was in Exeter: on a letter dated 11 December 1905 he gave his address as 8 Bystock Terrace, Exeter. On 13 January following, he gave an illustrated lecture entitled 'Notes of a naturalist in N. W. Canada' to members of the Exeter College Field Club and Natural History Society at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter: 'Mr. Hollis had on the table a very nice collection of water-colour sketches of most of the animals dealt with, drawn by his wife, which added much to the interest and lucidity of his paper.'

During 1906 and 1907 Hollis corresponded

occasionally with the Curator of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, William Stewart Mitchell D'Urban, and attended at least one other meeting of the Exeter College Field Club, on 11 February 1907, when he exhibited some lesser horseshoe bats (see also Hollis 1907a). A few published reports that were signed by him, as well as the addresses on his letters to D'Urban, suggest that the couple lived in Exeter during these years. Houston (1989b) was informed that Hollis had 'prepared many small mammal specimens, [and] helped out in a voluntary capacity' at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, between 1905 and 1908. His article (Hollis 1907a) on the occurrence of the lesser horseshoe bat in Devon bore the address of the Museum, while Hollis signed the sections on fishes (Hollis 1907b) and mammals (Hollis 1907c) within the 'Twenty-fifth report of the Scientific Memoranda Committee' which was published in *Reports and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, although his name was not among the list of the committee's members nor was he listed as a member of the Association during these years. This brief report of local mammals gave some personal details about Hollis's zoological work around Exeter: 'During the past two years ... I have hardly ever put down my traps without obtaining one or more [pigmy shrews] ... [and] In the last four time I have been out I have put down an average of twelve traps ...' (Hollis 1907c).

When he applied for the Fellowship of the Zoological Society of London early in 1908 Hollis gave his address as 55 Queen Street, Exeter, but there was a note appended stating that after 1 March his address would be The Museum, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

After settling in Aylesbury, Hollis's attention evidently changed towards archaeological and historical topics as indicated by his few subsequent publications in such periodicals as *Notes and Queries* and *Records of Buckinghamshire*, although he did contribute at least one more paper to *The Zoologist*, on the teeth of the European hedgehog (Hollis 1910).

Annie and Edwin Hollis lived in the curator's flat at the Museum for the rest of his life. He died on 12 July 1941.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are most grateful for the assistance of Sue Inskip (Special Collections, University of Exeter), Dr Isabelle Charmantier (Centre for Medical History, University of Exeter), and Michael Palmer (Archivist, Zoological Society of London) for their assistance. Hollis's date of birth was confirmed by the Deputy Superintendent Registrar of Westminster (Certified copy of an entry FD820337, 15 August 2011).

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