

Teesdale u3a The Kearton Brothers

Richard and Cherry Kearton were born in 1862 and 1871 respectively and brought up in the village of Thwaite in North Yorkshire. Their father was a yeoman farmer. In their lifetime the brothers became world famous pioneers of wildlife photography and film making. At the January meeting of Teesdale u3a, the remarkable story of their life was summarised in great detail by Helen Guy from the Keld Resource Centre.

As children, Richard and Cherry developed their interest in wild life from their grandfather and became very familiar with animal habitats, bird calls and birds' nests. The boys were very adventurous and when Richard was 7 years old, he fell from a tree as he was trying to view a bird's nest, leaving him with a permanent limp. The boys were brought up in relative poverty as the mines were in decline and sheep farming was precarious.

Richard became a farmer in Swaledale, before he moved to London to work for Cassell's publishing house, starting at the bottom addressing envelopes. He worked his way up to become manager of a publicity department.

Then began a lifetime of travelling the world to photograph and film wildlife. They took the first photograph of eggs in a bird's nest. Their film of a Masai lion hunt must have been the first recorded. They abseiled down cliffs on St Kilda with their equipment, and even surprised the local population with their bravery. They pioneered the use of hides, and the lifelike models of a hollow cow and a stuffed sheep became famous. Cherry is credited with directing over thirty films for his film companies. Cherry also became friendly with Theodore Roosevelt and directed a film 'Roosevelt in Africa'.

In 1895, the brothers published the first natural history book to be entirely illustrated by wildlife photographs. Cherry contributed photographs to 17 of Richard's books and wrote and illustrated a further 17 of his own. Cherry took the first film of London from the air. Their contribution to wildlife photography and conservation was widely acknowledged and was formally recognised when Richard was made a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London, and the Royal Geographical Society created the Cherry Kearton Medal and Award in Cherry's honour. The brothers had come a long way from their humble beginnings in Thwaite.

Helen gave an excellent presentation to an audience of over a hundred members. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 23rd February when Kate Bailey will be leading a discussion on climate change solutions.

Ian Reid