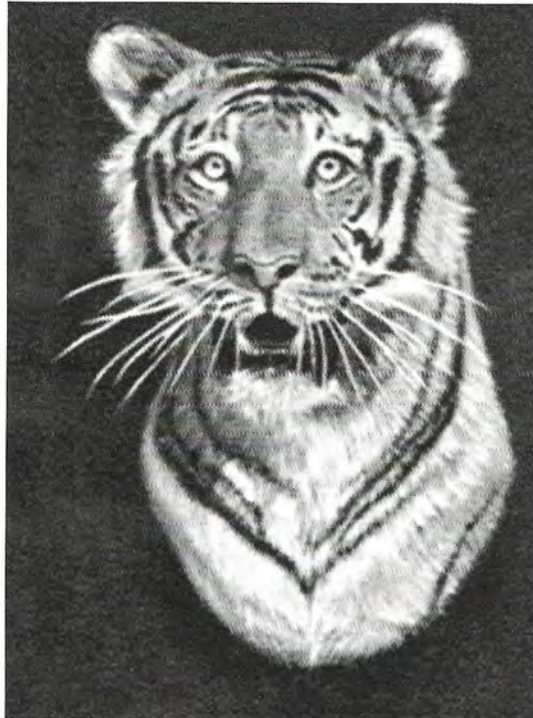


# VAN INGEN & VAN INGEN

Artists in Taxidermy



by  
P. A. Morris

MPM Publishing  
Ascot



*This was part of a treasure trove of documentary records that we were allowed to see: one of the log books used to track specimens through the works, in this case whole mount tigers in 1951.*

The whole place had an eerie air about it, silent now, yet full of ghosts, both animal and human. The only living inhabitants were the millions of termites and a small spotted owlet roosting among the rafters. In one corner was a rusting shovel standing by a dry and crumbling pile of clay, left by the last modeller. By a window there was a shaped wooden board supported on bent iron legs that would never now become the small giraffe that had been intended. Outside in the yard the remnants of a crumbling shed housed a pile of old blackbuck horns and a selection of skulls, including three rhinos, a hippo and several elephants. Evidently these larger skulls had been left there because the bone merchants (who removed all the smaller skulls after their jaws had been taken out) did not want elephant skulls as their milling machines could not cope with the very hard and dense teeth.

Elsewhere were row upon row of the concrete moulds that were once the secret of van Ingen's success, but now stood unused and obsolete. In odd corners of the yard lay the broken remains of still more discarded head moulds, with a selection of the larger ones slowly sinking into the earth under their own weight, as millions of termites undermined the soil on which they stood. We were warned not to touch them as dangerous snakes now often used the moulds as a protective lair.



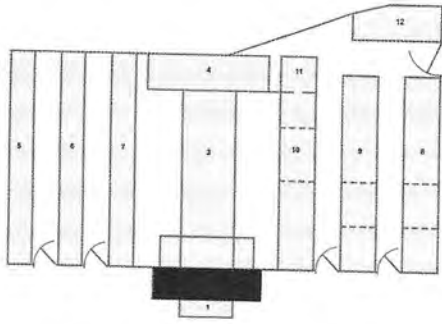
*This book seeks to share some of that remarkable experience and to provide a brief record of the van Ingen's achievement.*

Joubert also generously allowed us access to the firm's record books, now smothered with pungent mothballs in a belated attempt to deter further consumption by voracious insects. Those ledgers that had been spared by the munching millions dated back to 1913, with the remnants of one in his mother's neat handwriting dated 1894. These 'Order Books' meticulously logged in and out the tens of thousands of animals that had been prepared in the factory and dispatched to clients in India and abroad. Sadly, by 2003 the termites and various bonfires had already consumed much of the firm's remaining paperwork, especially during a major clearing-up session about two years previously.

I hope this book will serve to document one aspect of the story of human interactions with animals, recorded now while the opportunity still exists and before the remnants and memories of the world's largest taxidermy operation become scattered and lost forever.

Pat Morris, 2006





## The Showroom

From the portico, the main door led into a spacious hall (# 2) with a high roof and windows at each end. This formed a showroom where recent specimens were available for inspection before dispatch. Here visitors were met by a series of whole mounts and pictures on the wall illustrating the firm's work. Often the hall was filled with a surreal pageant of tigers leaping about, observed by the heads of bison and elephants around the walls. Few visitors went into the factory beyond.

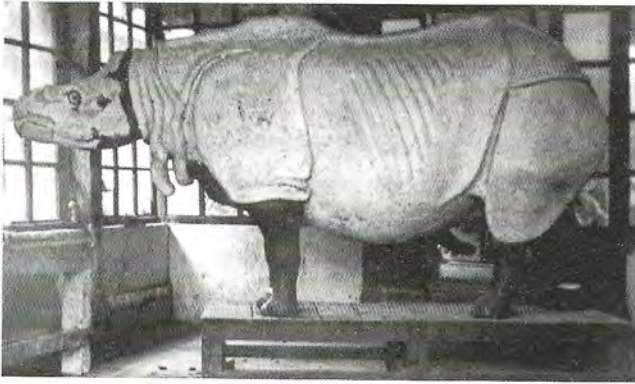
Across the hall was a short passage, with a small office on either side where books and bound collections of correspondence were stored, dating back at least until the 1920s. The letters included many routine enquiries and some also discussed arrangements to supply other taxidermists (such as Jonas Bros of Denver) with specimens, particularly skins of Indian mammals. There were also the many letters of fulsome praise and thanks from satisfied customers, many of which were reproduced extensively in van Ingen promotional literature.



*Some views of the showroom at various times.*



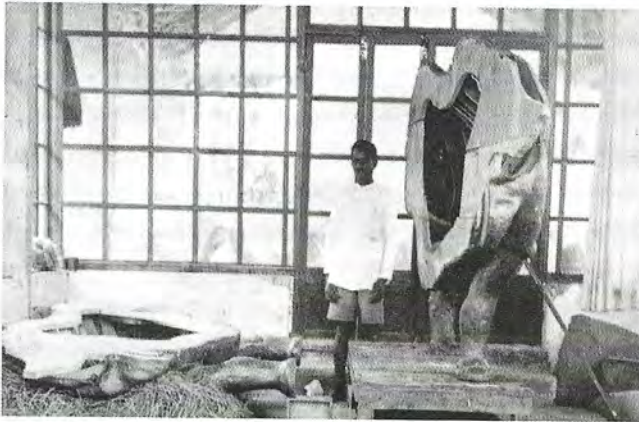
## Stages in the preparation of a full mount rhinoceros



*A sculpted model was made in clay of the flayed body, slightly smaller than the actual life size. Papier maché was applied to the surface, all over, to create a jacket that would form the manikin.*



*The layer of papier maché was cut away from the sculpted clay form in two halves, then strengthened by adding internal wooden struts.*



*The two halves could then be joined together to make a hollow body that was strong but not heavy.*



*The finished animal, ready to go.*



*The completed manikin, now with its head attached.*



*A full mount rhino leaving the factory by the back gate.*

## Leaving the Factory

Finished specimens were sprayed with a dilute suspension of white arsenic in water or methylated spirits. This was an effective way of preventing attack by the innumerable voracious insect pests, including ants and termites, that would otherwise reduce any organic materials to dust in a surprisingly short time.

As single jobs or batches were finally certified as complete, they would be removed from the central store, wrapped with sacking and bound with string before being fitted securely into wooden packing cases.

Vulnerable parts were protected using bundles of paper. At least two men were employed just for the packing and despatch of specimens. Rugs were wrapped in special cotton bags to keep them clean, the folded skin serving as padding for the modelled head. It appears that wax was sometimes applied to the teeth of open mouthed heads before dispatch, perhaps to protect them from chipping, but also to avoid rapid drying out that could result in their cracking and losing sections of their enamel surface.



Finally, the crates would be loaded on to a lorry or small bullock cart that took specimens to the station a couple of kilometres away, to begin their journey to all parts of India and further afield. The last action was for the office to annotate the main Order Book with a large D (often in red pencil), indicating that the order had been finally dispatched to its owner, and the date that this took place (see Chapter 5).

The two dates in the ledgers (arrival and dispatch) allow a rough calculation of how long certain jobs took. However, this could be very variable, as some customers clearly put pressure on and insisted that their work be expedited (as noted in the Order Book and job ledgers). Others were less demanding and some were probably tardy in payment, putting off the date that work would be sent to them. Nevertheless, the time taken to complete a full mount tiger seems to have averaged about one year, but varied between four and nineteen months. Heads took about three or four months to complete, including the drying process.



*Spectacular things leaving the factory must have been a familiar sight for local onlookers.*

### A selection of other van Ingen items

