

Catherine de Courcy, 2009. Dublin Zoo: an illustrated history. Cork, Collins Press.

De Courcy, Dublin Zoo – text on the rhinoceros

The rhinoceros

In 1864, the Zoo purchased an Indian rhinoceros, which was transported from Calcutta to Dublin via London, with the assistance of keeping staff from London Zoo. From the beginning the rhino was ‘very uneasy’ and had ‘a fit’. Haughton, Dr Dominic Corrigan and Dr C.P. Croker recommended that the animal be given three pints of boiled rice with bran and a gallon of milk, with some tonic power mixed in. But the fits continued and Haughton ordered that his allowance be increased from three to four pints of boiled rice, morning and

[page] evening. Cabbage was removed from the rhino’s diet and, as his health improved, he was given potatoes in order to reduce his allowance of hay – which was expensive. For the next few months the rhino appeared to settle, although no one was surprised that he sometimes had little interest in food. In December he made a ‘ferocious attack’ on the keeper Patrick Rice. No injury was reported. (31)

In a Sunday the following March, Arthur Foot, a medical practitioner and an active member of council, caught a boy ‘trying the thickness of the rhinoceros’s skin with a pin’ and threw him out. There were more reports of the rhino being unwell or agitated and then, on 5 April 1865 at four o’clock in the afternoon, Montgomery found the animal showing indications of acute abdominal pain and having a prolapsed rectum ‘to a frightful extent.’ He immediately called Mr Murphy, a veterinary surgeon of Parkgate Street, who suggested puncturing the protruding matter. Montgomery could not authorise that and sent for Haughton, Professor Dr McDowell, Arthur Foot and Hugh Ferguson, also a veterinary surgeon. He also sent the following telegraph to Abraham Bartlett, superintendent of London Zoo: ‘The rhinoceros has got prolapsus ani for some hours. What shall we do? The bowels were not out of order.’ (32)

[page] Haughton and his colleagues did not sit around waiting for a response. With great difficulty, they gave the rhino an enema of opium of three quarts of tepid water. Murphy said that he believed the inflammation had extended up the rectum and abdomen and gave up on him. With the rhino clearly in excruciating pain, a potion including castor oil, opium, aromatic spirits of ammonia, and spirits of turpentine to kill any worms, was administered with tepid water. As these measures were being taken, Bartlett’s response arrived from London: ‘Send for a veterinary surgeon. Let him treat the rhinoceros as he would a horse suffering from the same cause.’ (33)

At eleven o’clock in the evening the rhino at last became quieter, although Montgomery suspected it was from exhaustion rather than any impact from the medication. Keepers John Supple, Thomas Flood and James Gorman stayed all night and at four in the morning, the rhino died. The Royal Dublin Society offered £15 for the carcass, another offer of £16 was received, while Haughton offered £19 and won the bid.

[Postmortem found improper administration of Indian corn.]

Subsequently keeper Rice's wages were reduced from fifteen shillings a week to twelve shillings and sixpence per week for a year 'as a punishment for his disobedience of the council's orders, by means of which the death of the rhinoceros was caused.' (35)