

## EVIDENCE OF A RHINOCEROS IN CORK, IRELAND, IN NOVEMBER 1842

### Kees Rookmaaker

On 19 October 1842 there appeared an announcement in the *Cork Examiner* informing the public of the impending exhibition of a rhinoceros in the city of Cork, Ireland.

*The Nobility, Gentry, and Public in general, are most respectfully informed that the Stupendous MALE RHINOCEROS, upwards of 40 cwt. Weight, which cost the Zoological Society upwards of 1000 Guineas, the only Living Specimen ever exhibited in this Country, is on its passage to this city, and will be exhibited in a few days, of which further particulars on its arrival will be advertised. Oct. 19, 1842.*

The same advertisement is again found in the newspaper for another two weeks, on 21, 24, 28, 31 October, 2, 4 and 7 November 1842. The Zoological Society, as will appear, was not the one founded in Dublin in 1831, but the rather obscure one in Liverpool.

The rhinoceros must have reached Cork on Wednesday, 9 November 1842, because on that day the *Cork Examiner* for the first time included a more comprehensive account of the animal.

*NOW EXHIBITING AT MR. BURKE'S SPACIOUS PREMISES,  
Situated between Cook-st., and the old Theatre Royal, George's-street, the Great Wonder of the Animal Creation, the Stupendous Male Indian RHINOCEROS, or Unicorn of Scripture. The Animal so often mentioned in Holy Writ, being decidedly the only One-Horned Quadruped in the Creation.*

#### DESCRIPTION

*Next to the Elephant, the Rhinoceros is the most powerful of animals. It is usually found twelve feet long from the tip of the nose to the insertion of the tail, and from five to six feet high; and the circumference of its body is nearly equal to its length. It is, therefore, equal to the Elephant in bulk, and if it appears much smaller to the eye, the reason is, that its legs are much shorter. Its head is furnished with a horn, growing from the snout, sometimes three feet long; but for this, it would have the appearance of the head of the hog; the upper lip, however, is much longer in proportion, ends in a point, is very pliable, serves to collect its food, and deliver it into the mouth; the ears are large, erect, and pointed; the eyes are small and piercing; the skin is naked, rough, knotty, and lying upon its body in folds, after a very peculiar fashion; there are two folds very remarkable, one above the shoulders, and another over the rump; the skin is so thick as to resist a musket ball; the belly hangs low, the legs are short, strong, and thick, and the hoof is divided into three parts, each pointing forward.*

*The Rhinoceros is a native of the deserts of Asia and Africa, and is usually found in those extensive forests that are frequented by the Elephant and Lion.*

*The present specimen is a remarkably fine lively animal, seven years' old, brought from India by Captain Pope, ship Duke of Northumberland [=Northumberland].*

*It subsists entirely upon vegetable food, similar to the elephant. Open from Ten in the Morning till Nine at Night.*

*Admission. Ladies and gentlemen 1s, servants and children 6d.*

This larger announcement again appeared in the *Cork Examiner* on 11, 14, 16, and 18 November, while the last found inserted on Monday, 21 November 1842. Exactly the same text

also appeared on a Handbill, of which one copy is preserved in the Cork City and County archives (Richard Dowden Papers, U140/K/3/058) – here figured with the help of Mr Brian McGee, Archivist (fig. 1).

NOW

**EXHIBITING**

AT

**Mr. Burke's Spacious Premises,**

Situate between Cook Street, and the Old Theatre Royal, George's Street.

**THE GREAT WONDER**

Of the Animal Creation, The Stupendous Male Indian

**RHINOCEROS**

OR,

**UNICORN OF SCRIPTURE**

The Animal so often mentioned in HOLY WRIT, being decidedly

**The Only One-Horned Quadruped**

of the Creation.

---

**DESCRIPTION :—**

Next to the Elephant, the Rhinoceros is the most powerful of animals. It is usually found twelve feet long from the tip of the nose to the insertion of the tail, and from five to six feet high; and the circumference of its body is nearly equal to its length. It is, therefore, equal to the Elephant in bulk, and if it appears much smaller to the eye, the reason is, that its legs are much shorter. Its head is furnished with a horn, growing from the snout, sometimes three feet long; but for this, it would have the appearance of the head of a hog; the upper lip, however, is much longer in proportion, ends in a point, is very pliable, serves to collect its food, and deliver it into the mouth; the ears are large, erect, and pointed; the eyes are small and piercing; the skin is naked, rough, knotty, and lying upon its body in folds, after a very peculiar fashion; there are two folds very remarkable, one above the shoulders, and another over the rump; the skin is so thick as to resist a musket ball; the belly hangs low, the legs are short, strong, and thick, and the hoof is divided into three parts, each pointing forward.

The Rhinoceros is a native of the deserts of Asia and Africa, and is usually found in those extensive forests that are frequented by the Elephant and Lion.

The present Specimen is a remarkably fine lively animal, seven years old, brought from India by Captain Pope, ship Duke of Northumberland.

It subsists entirely upon vegetable food, similar to the Elephant.

**Open from Ten in the Morning till Nine at Night.**

**Admission, Ladies & Gentlemen 1s. Servants & Children, 6d.**

W. SCRAGGS, PRINTER.

Fig. 1. Handbill advertising the exhibition of a rhinoceros in November 1842.

The text of the "Description" was taken verbatim (omitting one paragraph) from the *List of the animals in the Liverpool Zoological Gardens* published in 1838, with the age of the animal also stated as seven years. The rhinoceros had been aged three years in a similar Liverpool Zoo list of 1834, and four years in the list of 1837. This text provides the link with the Liverpool Zoo which was owned by Thomas Atkins, who was known to have travelled around Great Britain with a menagerie, establishing a more permanent venue in 1832. Unless the text was just plagiarised, the rhinoceros in Cork must have been the same animal which Atkins had owned from June 1834 and which probably died around 1842-1843 (Rookmaaker 1993). Its history, being brought to England by Capt. Pope on the ship *Duke of Northumberland*, was mentioned both in the publicity of Liverpool Zoo and in the *Cork Examiner* advertisements. The same animal had been exhibited in the Dublin Zoo in July and August 1835, on loan from Atkins.

It is a great pity that none of the budding artists of the Irish town are known to have sketched the animal, because there remains some misunderstanding about its specific identity. Despite some claims otherwise, there is really no evidence to suggest that it was anything but a Greater one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*).

The person responsible of bringing it to Cork apparently was Richard C. Burke, who was said to have been a builder, but also was one of the entrepreneurs of the town in the mid-19th century. He restored the Theatre Royal which was destroyed by fire in April 1840 and continued to be mentioned in newspaper listings as its proprietor until the building was sold to the post office in 1875. Apparently the rhinoceros was shown on grounds next to the theatre, between Cook Street and Pembroke Street, in the centre of the city. There is no information found what happened to the animal after it was last advertised on 21 November 1842, and could have been returned to Liverpool. Or maybe it continued touring, or maybe it died.

There is one other notice of a rhinoceros in Ireland in the same period, which therefore might possibly refer to the same animal, still touring the country. Among a set of small announcements in the *Nenagh Guardian* of Saturday 14 January 1843 (p.1), it is said:

*An immense Indian Rhinoceros is now exhibiting at Ellen Street, Limerick.*

The *Nenagh Guardian* is still published in Tipperary. No further details could be retrieved from the newspapers on that period (among those scanned in <https://www.irishnewsarchive.com/>).

I said above that the information about the rhinoceros was copied from a Liverpool Zoo guide, but could have been plagiarized, meaning that the details would not actually refer to the specimen in Cork. In historical research, any discovery often raises more questions than can be answered. The reason for doubt is that it has been assumed that the Atkins rhinoceros died in 1842 or earlier, because its remains were catalogued by J.E. Gray in the British Museum in 1843. Of course, the rhinoceros could have died soon after its exhibition in Cork, maybe on the return journey, or even in Cork itself? Another possibility is that Atkins actually has owned two different rhinos. Maybe we will find the answer one day.

This is the only verifiable record of a rhinoceros ever shown in Ireland outside Dublin zoo. That park showed another Indian rhinoceros in 1864-65, as well as some specimens of the African black and white species. The exhibition in Cork in 1842 is therefore quite remarkable and needs to be recorded.

#### References:

- Gray, J.E., (1843). *List of the specimens of Mammalia in the collection of the British Museum*. London.  
Rookmaaker, L.C., (1993). The mysterious 'Liverpool rhinoceros'. *Zoologische Garten* 63 (4): 246-258.



# *The Bartlett Society*

Dedicated to studying yesterday's methods of keeping wild animals

## **JOURNAL 27**

**2018/2019**

ISSN - 1460 - 1303