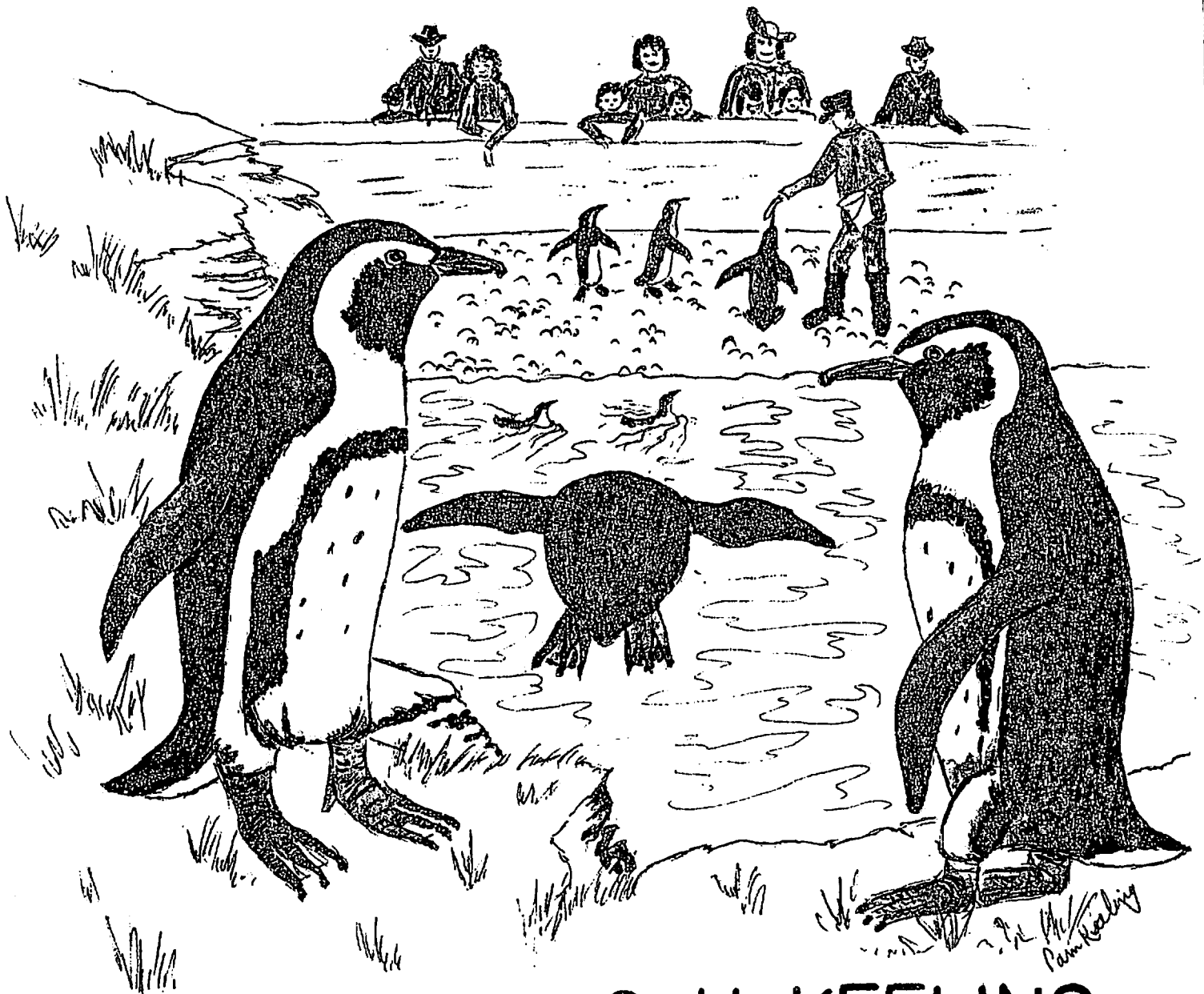


WHERE THE PENGUIN PLUNGED

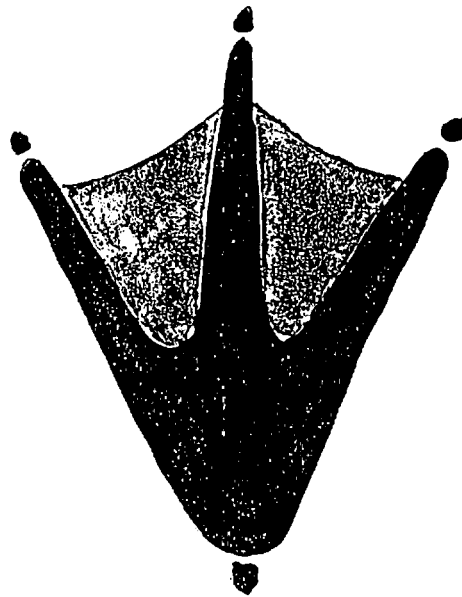


C. H. KEELING

WHERE THE PENGUIN PLUNGED

BY

C. H. KEELING



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CONTENTS

Page:

1.	Prologue:	A Few Tanks In Sheffield
5.	Chapter 1.	If I'd Known Then What I Know Now
30.	Chapter 2.	A Now Familiar Rhinoceros!
35.	Chapter 3.	Doctor Crocker's Menagerie
41.	Chapter 4.	Oxford Zoological Garden
49.	Chapter 5.	Down Oswald Street
55.	Chapter 6.	Two Short-lived Failures
65.	Chapter 7.	Thorp Arch
69.	Chapter 8.	Poole
73.	Chapter 9.	Westbury-on-Trym Wildlife Park
79.	Chapter 10.	Bridgemere Wildlife Park
85.	Chapter 11.	Haigh Park, Wigan
93.	Chapter 12.	Windsor Journey Park
99.	And So On, And On...	
101.	Postscript	

CHAPTER II

A NOW FAMILIAR RHINOCEROS!

I am fully aware that to some, perhaps even many, people the search for the truth concerning what was almost certainly an early and unrecorded Javan Rhinoceros at Manchester's Belle Vue shows signs of becoming my King Charles' Head! Be that as it may, I find it such an absorbing matter that I devoted a chapter to it in WIMP, where I assembled all the information I'd been able to glean about it and put it forward as a case in favour of the species - now perhaps the rarest of the big mammals - having once been shown in the Cotton Metropolis.

Since then I've been able to examine the skull of what I suspect was the B.V. specimen, and at this juncture feel I cannot do better than repeat the article I wrote about it for the 5th volume of the Bartlett Society Journal. Here it is:

"As is fairly well-known, I am particularly interested in a Rhinoceros that lived at Manchester's Belle Vue from 1856 until c.1870 - for the simple reason I am quite convinced it was a Javan (Rhinoceros sondaicus), and furthermore an unrecorded one that has not been listed in the painstaking researches of Richard J. Reynolds, the authority on captive Rhinoceroses.

"In my book "Where The Macaw Preened" (Clam Publications 1993) I presented all the evidence I had, which I consider to be quite convincing, to support my claim to identifying this animal correctly, but at that time I had not had the opportunity of examining a certain skull in the Manchester Museum. According to Professor Cave it was that of an aged male Javan Rhinoceros which, to judge by its dentition and osteological faults in the maxillary areas, had spent a considerable time in confinement, so I looked forward to the chance of a closer look at it when the Bartlett Society visited the museum, as I had good reason to believe it was that of the Belle Vue animal.

"On this occasion - 16th April 1994 - I was at first rather disconcerted to learn from Dr. Mike Hounsome, Keeper of Zoology, that another authority on Rhinoceroses, for whom I have every respect, had informed him in correspondence that he believed it to be a skull of the Indian species (R. unicornis), in spite of the fact that he had never seen it, let alone examined it. However, the moment I saw it my hopes were

justified and I looked with something approaching reverence at a skull of an undoubted Javan Rhinoceros.

"To confirm this to my satisfaction was the work of literally one second. As is well known to every Bartlett Society member, immediately above the superior maxillary area of a Rhinoceros skull is an ossified outgrowth that forms the pedicle or "boss" on which the horn, or horns, rest. In the Black species, which has long horns, its surface is heavily convoluted so they can "bed" securely on it; those of the White's skull are almost as rough, while those of the Indian, which has a much smaller horn, is less deeply creased still. On the Manchester skull this pedicle (if it can be called such) was minute, in fact little more than a convex area, and as I was fortunate enough to be allowed to examine it physically, I discovered it was perfectly smooth.

"It is equally well known in the Society that the Javan Rhinoceros has such a small horn that it is barely noticeable in the few photographs that exist of the species, while the female often lacks one altogether.

"Thus, this - to me - proves this skull to be that of a Javan, and greatly amplifies my contention that an example of the species lived for a decade and a half in industrial Lancashire in the 19th Century.

"A mystery, that seemingly was noticed for the first time on this visit, will presumably never be solved, however.

"On the top of the skull, to the right hand side of the frontal area, I noticed that a portion - about the size of a large orange segment - had been neatly cut out, presumably with a surgical saw. I would add that I've never seen a similar dissection performed on a prepared skull, including human ones, before. As other Society members who were there will verify, I called Dr. Hounsoms's attention to this and to my (our?) surprise he announced he had not noticed it before. At my observation that it looked like trepanning, he carefully felt it before saying he thought it must have been done posthumously as the sharp edges were in no way worn.

"As I say, why this should have been done presents us with a complete mystery as clearly it was performed for some definite purpose. For one thing, I am rather tempted to suggest it could be the work of a doctor, as I greatly doubt whether a mid-19th Century "veterinary surgeon", or Horse-Doctor to use the perfectly acceptable term at the time, could have wielded a surgical saw with such skill, but there I run out of ideas.

"Unless - and this is a very long shot - there was some unusual and tumorous growth on the head that was obviously attached to the skull. On the animal's death it was considered desirable to preserve it as a pathological specimen - which, again, sounds more likely to be the decision of a doctor rather than a contemporary veterinary surgeon.

"If, and "if" is the operative word, that was the case I suppose it is at least within the bounds of possibility that it is still in

existence somewhere - and a DNA test on it would soon decide whether the long-forgotten sufferer was Indian or Javan!"

I suppose there might be one or two who wish I'd now add words to the effect "This correspondence is now closed", but it's tempting to suggest there could be a photograph or other illustration of the animal somewhere. To this end I'd love the opportunity of having another look through the "Belle Vue Collection" in the Chetham Library, Manchester, which is packed into eight large boxes - and so far I've been able to muster the time to unpack just two of them.



This is the skull, as exhibited in Manchester Museum. An arrow indicates the point at which a section has been removed, as mentioned in the text.

Photo: C.H. Keeling



Doctor Crocker's Menagerie on the seafront at Blackpool.
The photograph dates from about the mid 1880s.