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WHERE THE CRANE DANCED

MORE ABOUT ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS OF THE PAST.

BY
C.H. KEELING



ILLUSTRATED BY PAMELA KEELING



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Chapter IV

The Travelling Menageries

The old travelling menageries have gone, and most people will say or think words to the effect "Thank God, they were nothing more than mobile prisons for unfortunate animals", but there are two sides to every story and it must be borne in mind that many kinds of animals did very well in them, had the all-important close liaison with their keepers, and in some cases bred well under the most unlikely conditions. For the best part of two centuries they offered many interested people their only opportunity to see creatures from the four corners of the world (as I pointed out in WTLT the famous 18th century surgeon Hunter was also a comparative zoologist who would visit some of the roughest fairs in order to study and sometimes buy specimens which were not infrequently unknown to science) and incredible as it might sound a travelling menagerie installed a guide-lecturer to discourse on the exhibits long before any zoological garden began to think it might be a good idea.

As we shall see shortly the last of the true or traditional travelling menageries came off the road in 1931, thus marking the vale of a surprisingly well-ordered and organised way of life. Since then, of course, there have been small animal collections which have been taken round as part of the attractions of a circus, but these do not really come under the heading of this chapter, any more than did the animal shows that often accompanied fairs - although I do owe some small debt to the latter. When I was a small boy Proctor's Funfair, or as it was always called for some reason "the feast", came to Whittington Moor a few miles from my home, and although I hated the noisy and boisterous atmosphere of the place I always went just to spend the whole time admiring Monkeys, Coypus (sorry, I mean Giant Rats caught in Liverpool docks), Foxes and Badgers. Years later, in 1950, in the village of Barlow I saw an outstanding collection attached to a fair which included a Lioness, Spotted Hyena, Sun Bear, Husky Dogs, Guinea Baboon, Sooty Mangeby and Pheasants, but this was far above most of its kind. Frankly I am not sorry this sort of show has gone, as although the excitement of moving about from place to place was first-rate occupational therapy for the animals they were nevertheless subjected to a great deal of teasing from ignorant and irresponsible people. Anyway, adding to my zoological knowledge among rowdy merriment was a facet of my education I shared with the illustrious Hunter, and if it was good enough for him it was good enough for me!

It is by no means easy to write on how the travelling menageries operated in any degree of detail, as there does not seem to be a single volume in existence devoted to the subject as such, and after months of large fruitless research I have arrived at the conclusion there is no-one in the country who might be regarded as an authority on the matter. Messrs Jamieson, Davis and Clay of the Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain have gone out of their way to be helpful,

despite their protestations that the old menageries were/are not really in their line - which makes all the more surprising the amount of useful information they were able to uncover for me, especially concerning the Bostock and Wombwell outfit - in fact this is the only one which has really been chronicled in a detailed manner for posterity.

Most of the animals exhibited in the travelling menageries lived in beast waggons - barred cages on wheels which were usually pulled by Horses, although occasionally Elephants or Camels were pressed into this sort of service; shutters were affixed when on the march lest passers-by might get a glimpse of something for nothing, and usually when on exhibition those at the back and sides would be left on to provide shelter from cold winds or driving rain. The roofs were always solid and under each vehicle was a roomy locker which held foodstuffs, cleaning utensils and the driver's and/or keeper's personal effects. By dint of operating sliding partitions such a waggon could be divided into as many as three compartments, and these were home to a wide range of species such as big Cats, Bears, Wolves, Hyenas, Monkeys, Elephants, Camels, Porcupines, Parrots, Pelicans and, more unexpectedly, such ungulates as Zebras, Deer and Antelopes. Their keepers were with them the whole time and this was probably one reason why so many of them lived long and healthy lives. These shows, consisting sometimes of twenty or more waggons, trundled their way the length and breadth of the country - England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, in fact there is a tragic case on record of one menagerie being lost on a ship which went down in the Irish Sea - and as far as I am concerned their undoubted usefulness was summed up in one sentence by E.H. Bostock in his book "Menageries, Circuses and Theatres", "It will thus be seen that Wombwell's menageries have now been known throughout Great Britain for over 120 years as "wandering teachers of natural history" and had it not been for such teachers, what would the people of our towns and villages, and remote outlying districts in the wilds, from Land's End to John o'Groats, have known of wild animals?" Splendid - I couldn't have put it better myself.

The advance agent would have plastered a town with posters a week or more before the show arrived which, if it were of respectable dimensions, would arrange itself on three sides of a square, being covered with sheets of canvas if the weather were bad (one large waggon was utilised to carry props of this kind). Huge sections of a wooden facade would be speedily erected to form the front of the display, its gaudy murals of unlikely-looking denizens of the wild, often locked in mortal combat, giving a highly misleading impression of what was to be seen within. As it grew darker flares would be lit inside, which in all probability gave quite a Hogarthian aspect to the scene, although it is interesting to learn that Bostock and Wombwell's, long ago, pioneered the use of electric lighting in one of their travelling menageries. In mild weather the keepers slept under the waggons, not particularly restful if nocturnal amblers lived above, or put up at local pubs if it were unsettled. A much later development was to design beast waggons which had but a shallow exhibition area for small species, while little more than a boarded-off corridor at the back served as human sleeping quarters. Surprisingly, even Elephants were sometimes housed in waggons, and it is recorded that one built for the purpose "measured 30 feet in length, 13 in height and 9 in width; it had 6 wheels and needed a team of 12 Horses." I strongly suspect this would have been for the safe housing of a recalcitrant or unreliable animal, as usually an Elephant

walked from site to site and was exhibited shackled to something solid
- the same went for Camels too.

As far as can be gathered travelling menageries, as we know them, originated in the first decade of the 18th century, but virtually nothing is known about these early efforts. The first one I have been able to learn anything about must have been operating about the 1730's, and although not even its name has been recorded I was absolutely thrilled to discover that it contained what might well have been proof that an animal that most people relegate to the Loch Ness Monster bin really did exist - and comparatively recently too. In a nutshell, I have always been interested in the mysterious creature usually referred to as the Nandi Bear, which might still exist on the Uasin Gishu Plateau in Kenya; some people swear it was/is a belated Chalicotherium, a primitive ungulate with claw-like hooves which officially became extinct long ago, while others poo-poo the whole tale as an utter fabrication. Those who claim to have seen it, though, and they are many, all talk of a Hyena-like creature with the head of a Bear. And please note this menagerie which might have shown one was operating getting on for two centuries before Kenya was opened up by Europeans, so in other words no-one had ever heard of it then. I first came upon this intriguing possibility when looking through some old numbers of "Animal and Zoo Magazine", the long-defunct publication I mentioned in WTLT. In the edition for February 1938 it stated that a reader in Yorkshire had found a bill "two hundred years old" which read "Posted at the sign of the Spread Eagle, Halifax. This is to give notice, to all Gentlemen, Ladies and others, that there is to be seen at the sign of the Coffee House, a curious collection of living wild creatures....." It then went on to list its attractions, chiefly Monkeys and smallish carnivores, the last of which was "A young HALF and HALF; the head like a Hyena, the hind part like a Friesland (Polar?) Bear." Now it would certainly not have been either a Hyena or a Bear, as clearly whoever penned the advertisement apparently knew what they looked like, so one is left to ponder on this curiosity, which sounds so much like descriptions of that weird threshold-of-science creature which has so often been seen by sober people of high reputation as it has gone slinking through the long grass in the African night. One cannot help but wonder what other unlikely things were first shown in this way, as a point not widely known is that what was probably the first Gorilla to be seen in this country was exhibited in Bostock and Wombwell's menagerie as long ago as the middle of the last century but no-one realised they had such a treasure and it was in fact thought to be a Chimpanzee. I stress the word probably, incidentally, because there is some slight evidence that an even earlier specimen was kept for a time by Charles Waterton, the eccentric Yorkshireman many people consider to have been a naturalist, although as far as I can discover what he knew about animals was hardly worth knowing. Another attraction at the "Nandi Bear menagerie" was from its description nothing more than a domestic Zebu, but what was said about it makes strange reading. Described as a Red Buffalo from Madagascar, it was said to have been hunted for "15 days 4 hours by 12 men," of whom it killed three and wounded four: it was very fierce "but by repeated Bastinadoes night and morning instead of giving him Victuals is become quite tame and you can handle him as you please."! There was also the following of highly debatable authenticity, to the effect that one "Angria the Pirate" who terrorised the island for many years kept seventy five of these creatures which he used to load with goods he had captured from merchant ships - one could "carry a Ton a Thousand Miles in 12 Days without rest." Could it, by Jove?

By far and away the biggest of all the touring menageries was Bostock and Wombwell's (to be known henceforth for the sake of speed in my laborious two-finger typing as B&W): it is written up in some detail as at least two books have been produced about it by the Bostock family. The best is the already mentioned "Menageries, Circuses and Theatres", which is a mine of information, but it mentions so many subsidiary shows run by brothers, sisters and cousins that before long one's head starts to reel as one tries to remember who is who, something the volume has in common with "Wuthering Heights."

It all began in 1777, when George Wombwell was born in the hamlet of Dudnored in north Essex. From childhood he was interested in animals, of which he kept a large and varied number, and by the first years of the 19th century had set off along the alternately dusty and muddy roads of England with his first convoy of beast waggons; he was phenomenally successful and within a surprisingly few years boasted the greatest exhibition of its kind hitherto seen. By 1840 at Bartholomew Fair, for example, one could marvel at nearly twenty Lions, Tigers with cubs, what was described as a black Tiger (if it were melanistic it would be the first one ever recorded), a Puma, a Jaguar, a Serval, an Ocelot, Leopards, Genets, Striped and Spotted Hyenas, Wolves, Jackals, Coatis, Raccoons, a Polar Bear, a Sloth Bear, Black and Brown Bears, what was described as a Honey Bear (a term I have seen variously applied to the Sun Bear and the Kinkajou), two Porcupines, three Elephants, an Indian Rhinoceros, a pair of Gnus, "a white Antelope" which could have been an Arabian Oryx or a Blackbuck, a species rather inclined to throw albino individuals, a Zebu, an Axis Deer and, most surprisingly, three Giraffes, and these were just some of the larger species shown. I am most intrigued at the mention of the Indian Rhinoceros (which could have been the same one mentioned at Boughton Green Fair as early as 1818) as this appears to be one of the few captive examples of this species to have escaped the carefully wielded net of Richard J. Reynolds, the painstaking American chronicler who I mentioned in WTLT. Even more fascinating is the mention, at the same place, of what was described as a River Cow - and discounting the very slight possibility that it could have been a Manatee, which is difficult to keep even today - I have concluded that it can only have been a Hippopotamus, which substantiates my claim, made for the first time in any publication in WTLT, that there was an earlier British specimen than the famous Obaysch who, on his arrival at Regent's Park on 25th May 1850, was regarded as the first of his species to be seen in this country in historic times. No less a personage than Lord Byron said he saw a specimen exhibited in the Strand in the early part of the 19th century - a statement which, almost unbelievably, seems to have escaped the notice of every other researcher - and I regard this report, no doubt concerning the same specimen, as further evidence that it did indeed exist.

In 1839 one James Bostock, who came from near Leek in north Staffordshire, joined the show as a Horsekeeper: after nine years he was appointed advance agent, and soon after he married one of the Wombwells. They had three sons, all of whom came into the concern and in time there were no less than three well-stocked menageries touring all over Great Britain and much of Europe; the time had come for the Bostocks to become the dominant partners. George Wombwell died in November 1850 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery with an impressive stone Lion surmounting his grave. He left what he had created in excellent hands, as besides being good with animals the Bostocks as a family possessed tremendous business acumen, although his widow personally managed a subsidiary show ambitious enough to exhibit such unlikely things for a mobile menagerie as a Tapir, an Emu and a Cheeta until 1865.

By the late 1860's the largest of the shows obtained a most unusual acquisition for the time of day - an African Elephant. There was then a widespread belief that this species was intractable and extremely difficult to handle, despite the fact that the famous Jumbo and Alice were currently giving rides at Regent's Park, so it must have been with some trepidation that this impressive beast was purchased, as being installed in a custom-built Elephant House was one thing - the beast waggon and the tent and the shackle were quite another. Lizzie turned out to be a very quiet and tractable animal, even to the extent of remaining under control when her back was badly burned by a flare and subsequently submitting to painful treatment, which clearly suggests that someone there knew what he was doing when it came to handling Elephants. Of her, E.H. Bostock tells the quite famous and oft-repeated story of the legendary memory of these animals: at Tenbury in 1875 Lizzie fell ill with colic, which was cured by the local chemist who concocted some sort of draught and poured it down her throat; four years later the menagerie came back to town and in the crowd watching its arrival was the said chemist who, on being spotted by his erstwhile patient, had to endure the tender caresses of her trunk as she stopped and made straight for him. No, I'm inclined to agree with you - I don't believe it either! I have seen a photo of her, taken in 1887, harnessed to the show's band waggon which she is pulling in the company of several Camels, and from it I estimate she was something like nine feet in height: I am afraid though that making a wild animal behave in this sort of way just makes me sick. In 1872 she killed a fourteen year old boy at Stoke on Trent, but at the subsequent inquest she was absolved from blame as many witnesses verified that he had persisted in teasing and provoking her. Lizzie died at Llansawell, Carmathenshire, on 16th June 1888, and there was a considerable struggle to drag her three and a half ton carcass from the waggon she had badly damaged in her death throes; she had been with the Bostocks for about twenty years, which was very good going especially when one bears in mind that little was known of the biological requirements of a captive African Elephant in those days. If the aficionado cares to repair to the august halls of the Swansea Museum, he will see the mounted body of a large female African Elephant which was born in the fastnesses Abyssinia and fated to die in a small and remote Welsh village - yes, it's Lizzie.

At about the turn of the century the Bostock family's zoological enterprises became big business - there is no other word for it. In 1895 a huge building in Glasgow, known as Olympia, was taken over, filled with wild animals and opened as the Scottish Zoo; it became very popular and operated for a number of years. A rather similar but smaller place was opened near Ipswich and the three mobile shows, still going strong, continued to travel not only over every part of the British Isles, but much further afield too - as far as South Africa, the Far East and Japan, even during the first world war. Educational work with wild animals was revolutionised about this time by the appointment of the "Travelling Schoolmaster", an impressive gentleman with his own caravan, who was there solely to take people round and give them information about the animals - accurately, I hope. There were huge winter shows in the major English cities and all seemed to be going very well indeed. But most of the family were getting on in years, and some had already retired or died, and bit by bit they began to, shall we say, draw in their horns, especially after the war. It had always been a strongly family affair and as there were now fewer of them, gradually, almost imperceptibly, they began of their own volition to slow their activities down.

A menagerie would be taken off the road and the stock sold, a winter show would be smaller and less ambitious In any case, tastes were changing and people in the main no longer liked to look at wild animals in cages - in fact there were the first excited rumours being bruited abroad of a wonderfully spacious place where animals would be shown almost at liberty in a few years' time - at a Bedfordshire village called Whipsnade.

During the 1926 touring season it was recorded that a Professor (?) George Braham was in charge of two Asiatic Elephants named Dixie and Rosie, which I find particularly interesting, as although it was well before I was born, fate was to decree that years later I was to get to know Dixie; what became of Rosie is something of a mystery, although I rather suspect she could have ultimately ended up in the short-lived Oxford Zoological Garden. If so, she went from there in 1936 or 7 to the Bristol Zoological Garden, where she died in 1962. The shadows were rapidly closing in, however, and after unsuccessful attempts had been made to persuade the City of Glasgow to buy the whole collection in order to start its own permanent zoological garden (something it did not get round to doing until 1947) it was decided, after nearly 130 years as "wandering teachers of natural history" to call it a day and sell up. The remaining animals, a comparative handful, were shown over Christmas 1931 at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, and the Menagerie, which as long ago as 1818 had shown such unlikely exhibits as its own home-bred Leopards, Nylghai, Zebras, "Ant Bear from Canada" whatever that might have been, "beautiful Serpents", Crocodiles and a collection of Macaws, Lories and Lorrikeets (the latter not easy to keep as they require a soft diet and will not thrive on seed), was sold to the Zoological Society of London and became the nucleus of the infant Whipsnade Zoological Park's collection.

On 16th January, 1932, the animals were loaded onto a special train to begin their 370 mile journey to their new home - two Elephants, several Leopards, Lions, Tigers, two Wolves, two Camels, two Brown Bears, a Polar Bear, Spotted and Striped Hyenas, a Sea Lion, a Kangaroo, over 20 Monkeys of various species, and no less than 45 small mammals of unlisted species. From the Daily Express - "Menagerie Train Mobbed - Cheered on its 400 miles across Britain. - at Carlisle people had been admitted to the platform to see the fun. There were 730 of them, the station master told me. It was a triumph. Barriers were put up. Police had to lock the station doors. We steamed out to ringing cheers. Only to see the King going to Balmoral do the Carlisle people throng the station normally it was the same everywhere. The train drew up at stations and masses of boys and girls cheered the bright yellow cages strapped to the railway waggons." Is it my imagination, or were people rather nicer in those days? Fate, which works in the strangest ways, seems to have decreed that a baby boy, just 13 days old while all this was going on, should be sitting typing it down for posterity over half a century later! Everything was unloaded at Luton station and speedily installed in new and spacious homes, although the Elephants and Camels arrived rather later after making the eight mile journey, through Dunstable, on foot - but this would be just a short stroll for an ex- B & W animal.

Dixie, a very large Elephant said by those who knew her to have a will of her own, was destroyed on 21st October, 1963, after having injured a foot on a metal spike; I had often admired her and considered her a very typical example of her species. Braham stayed with her until his retirement in the 1950s, and, although I did not get to know him, nevertheless remember him well - a strange-looking character with dark curly hair, who wore an old-fashioned butterfly collar no matter what job he happened to be doing. I always thought he looked as though he could have been an Anglo-Indian, but Mr. Phil Bates, the now-retired doyen of Whipsnade's overseers, thinks he was more likely to have been a pure Romany. Believe it or not, but there are some (un-named) members of staff at Whipsnade who swear that Braham's ghost haunts the Elephant House, and has often been seen!

Less than a year ago I sat in Mr. Bates' parlour and listened spellbound to his reminiscences of Whipsnade's early years. Yes, he certainly remembered the B & W animals arriving there - Lions, several Leopards including a female with cubs, and an old female Polar Bear with, almost incredibly, a Wolf for a companion. "At least" said my host "he was supposed to be a Wolf, but over the years I have come to have my doubts, as the first thing he did on seeing me was to bark!"

Shortly afterwards a member of the Bostock family opened a small zoological collection at Southend-on-Sea that was destined to play a very important part in my life, but to find out about it and what it contained you will have to read WTLF.

When it comes to trying to find out something about the surprisingly large number of other travelling menageries that were on the road in days of yore, one's task becomes incredibly difficult, as very little, and in some cases precisely nothing, has been recorded about them. Politos (which eventually became the Exeter 'Change collection, again vide WTLF), Mander's, Sidgewick's, Braham's (surely some forebear of Dixie's keeper), Ballard's, Whittington's, Day's (a bit more about this in a little while), Anderton and Rowland's, Simon's and Howis' all came and went, mostly utterly and completely without trace, and I should dearly love to find out more about them but in the vast majority of cases I have done nothing but draw blanks; to make matters worse there is no one in the country who could be called an authority on travelling menageries, so a zoological investigator is completely thrown on his own devices.

The Howis establishment was an early one, as there exists a hand-bill stating that on 8th October 1814 it could be visited on the North Inch, Perth. Who he was, where he was based and for how long he operated are all complete mysteries, but his poster informs us it was "Howis' Grand Assemblance of Living Birds and Beasts. Ladies and Gentlemen 1/-, tradespeople 6d. Nothing fabulous (or in other words imaginary). Nothing offensive or intimidating will be seen. Birds and beasts bought, sold and exchanged." There was a pair of Lions, a splendidly named Bengal Royal Tiger, a "Ravenous* Black Wolf" (pity apparently nobody thought to feed it), Kangaroos, "Coatimandors from the lands of the Nile" (nothing fabulous? - the Coatis are from Central and South America), large American Eagle,

* "Ravenous" - a made up word meaning Raven-black.

Raccoons, Yellow and Orange Crusted (sic) Cockatoos (could have been the Leadbeater's species), "Scarlet Macaw from the Spanish Main" (steady, me hearties.....) and "Monkeys and birds from the East and West Indies" - and that seems to be everything that has been chronicled and has survived about Mr. Howis' zoological enterprises when George III was king and disabled veterans of the Napoleonic Wars begged in the streets.

We know far more about Mander's Grand National Star Menagerie (yes, it really was so-called) simply because when its life ground to an end and the collection came under the hammer in August 1875 at Islington's Agricultural Hall the auctioneer listed each and every specimen which was for disposal. Incidentally, this concern (which was financed by a wealthy Turtle merchant - for their soup and shells unfortunately - from Liverpool) seems to have been disliked by everybody - B&W's were their sworn enemies and Bartlett of the Z.S.L. had nothing but contempt for it: anyway, here is what was sold, along with the prices they fetched.

1. Two Lion cubs, born at the Agricultural Hall. 18 months old (so it sounds as though they ended up there more or less permanently) £150.
2. Pregnant Lioness £150. 3. Female Spotted Hyena £5. 4. Breeding Lioness, 5 years. £30. 5. Leopardess £30. 6. Male Panther (sic) £12.
7. Female Jaguar £30. 8. Ditto £32. 9. Pair of Tasmanian Devils £6. (someone got a bargain here!). 10. Wombat £5.10.0. 11. "American Raccoon, fine small Monkey and a Cat" £3. (!). 12. Raccoon 8/-, which means 4Op, sonny. 13. "Mongoose in cage - the finest specimen in England" £1.2.0.
14. "A remarkably fine variegated Mandrill or Red and Blue Baboon from Abyssinia (nonsense) - the only specimen in England (rubbish)." £105.
15. Male Canadian Black Bear £1.6.0. 16. Male Russian or Grizzly Bear £1 (the Bear market seems to have been a bit sluggish). 17. "Very handsome Zebra, the largest in England." £30. 18. South African Gnu or Horned Horse, "very rare" (an old dodge of showmen was to exhibit this Antelope under this latter title) £51. 19. American Wolf (no price mentioned, so perhaps was withdrawn). 20. Very fine Spotted Hyena (ditto). 21. Silver-haired Jackal (ditto). 22. Young female black Donkey (ditto). 23. "The Right of Using Title Mander's Grand National Star Menagerie" (interesting to note it fetched nothing; personally I would not have given fourpence for it). 24. "A brown golden-colour male Java Hare" £2 - which interests me enormously, as I should very much like to know the true identity of this species, which seemed quite common in the zoological collections of yesterday, although there is no animal officially so-named. It was recorded in the stock lists of both the Manchester and Liverpool Zoological Gardens, but never was the all-important scientific name given; on the island of Java there does indeed live a species of Hare (Nesolagus) but I'm certain it wasn't this comparative rarity - perhaps it was just a dealers' name for something still very much in evidence. 25. Black Opossum - "great rarity" 11/-, or 55p. 26. "Three handsome White- and Red-nosed Cockatoos" (could have been the Slender-billed) £1.10.0, so someone hit the jackpot here. 27. Blue and Yellow Macaw. Four guineas. 28. Red and Blue Macaw £4. 29. "A valuable orange-coloured crested talking Cockatoo" (might have been the Moluccan) £7. 30. Three more "White- and Red-nosed Cockatoos" - which apparently didn't raise a sou between them. 31. "Very fine Pelican" £4.5.0. 32. "Very fine Camel" £7.10.0. 33. Ditto £7. 34. Ditto £20. 35. Ditto, ditto. 36. Canel calf four months old. £21. 37. female Llama £16.10.0. 38. Two milch Goats £3. 39. A Sheep (sic) £1.5.0.

One of the Lionesses went to the Bristol Zoological Gardens. The famous naturalist Frank Buckland, who recorded all the above for posterity,

said Lions did well there because instead of being given the usual diet of nothing but Horsemeat they sometimes got a Goat "which they eat up bones, hair and all and thrive." This method of feeding captive carnivores was decades ahead of its time, and would have been when the gardens were under the superintendentship of a Mr. J.T. Jackson. "Topsy" the young black Donkey was said to be the offspring of a Mule (in my book "Meet The Mammals" (Harrap 1962) I briefly discuss the strange reports one hears from time to time of these theoretically sterile hybrids producing young) and the Camel bought for £7.10.0. was so vicious that a few days later, according to the Ipswich Journal, he attacked and injured a keeper in the travelling menagerie that had bought him. And so with a clatter of ghostly hooves and rumble of spectral wheels Mander's Grand National Star Menagerie disappeared from the scene.....

There was another travelling menagerie which, for no specific reason I could put my finger on, intrigues me enormously; it seems to have left no records of what it did or where it went, it was certainly not among the major ones and I very much doubt if there are forty or fifty people in the country who have ever heard of it. I wonder whether I am so attracted to this show because I have seen the mortal remains of one of its inhabitants?

The second world war is drawing to its close, and a schoolboy has discovered that Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, houses an excellent natural history section - so he makes the twelve mile journey there by bus and tram as often as he can to revel in the wonder of species other than his own; in fact years later his first wife was to complain that he'd studied every species but one - his own! In one of the galleries was mounted a young Capybara, the biggest of all rodents and a native of South America, which was set on a flat wooden base painted black; the side of the base bore the legend in white letters "Died in Day's Menagerie. Presented by Mr. Day." What was Day's Menagerie like, I wondered. What else had it got? How long ago are we talking about? I asked an attendant if he knew anything about it, but he hadn't the foggiest idea. Long after I got to know the then director slightly and sought his help, but he was primarily a meteorologist and I don't think he was really interested in where the animals had come from - anyway, I was as much in the dark as ever. As I say, I don't know why, but that one long-dead Capybara and a few words had really contrived to ignite little spots in my brain and heart. Then came a really good Assistant Keeper of Natural Sciences to the Museum, one David Whiteley, who is both enthusiastic and helpful - and only too pleased to look further into the Day saga. He writes to me "I have tried to find out a little more about Day's Menagerie. Between 1892 and 1896 several corpses were donated to this museum by "Mr. Day" or "Day Brothers" of Day's Menagerie. They included a Lion, Lioness, Camel, Monkey, Ruffed Lemur and the Capybara (which we still have, although not on display). I have searched our accession registers, donations book and newspaper cuttings and found no specific address, although the data with the Lioness reads as follows: "Shot in Day's Menagerie at Blackburn having escaped from its cage to attack an Elephant in the night." Blackburn, here, could refer to Blackburn near Tinsley in Sheffield."

This tells me quite a lot. Apparently the Days operated largely round the Sheffield area of south Yorkshire for at least the greater part of the 1890's - unless of course it went further afield and donated other casualties to museums (I always think the plural should be "musea")

I know nothing about - and the show was sufficiently ambitious to boast an Elephant. The Ruffed Lemur from Madagascar is significant too, as this was decidedly uncommon in displays of this sort and in fact seems to be the only specimen I can locate in the lists of any travelling show.

Two members of the Circus Fans' Association of Great Britain have been most helpful and have provided valuable information. Mr. M. Hippersley Cox of Hartland, Devon, tells me that in the Illustrated Police News (this was nothing to do officially with the police, but what would today be called a tabloid which specialised in lurid and gory details of "battle, murder and sudden death"; if you want a good laugh try to obtain a copy) for 29th May 1875 there is a report of a "Man attacked by Elephant at Day's Menagerie", while the edition for 18th September of the same year told of "Savage attack on a woman by A Dromedary at Day's Menagerie." Most unfortunately my informant does not know where these events occurred, but an intriguing thought dawned upon me concerning the latter event as a) the I.P.N. was not a newspaper reporting current events but printed whatever it happened to hear about, sometimes weeks after it took place, and b) it was notorious for getting hold of the wrong end of the stick. Could the Camel's victim have been a man rather than a woman, and might not the event have taken place a month before - and could it have happened at Ipswich, and was the animal newly purchased from Mander's? Just a thought, that's all. Mr. Hal Thomas of Southampton supplies the interesting information that Day's Menagerie was in fact an offshoot of B&W in the first place as the original Day, one John, was a relation of Wombwell, who bequeathed him one third of his animals. We can date its launching then to 1850, the year of Wombwell's death, and as he left his affairs and stock in a very strong state we can assume that to start with at least it was a very impressive display. He tells me E.H. Bostock bought Day's up in 1891, which only makes matters more fascinating, as this is completely at variance with the dates of the presentations to Weston Park Museum. During much of the present century various Day descendants worked in circuses, and "Before the last war the remnants of the Day family operated fairs in Kent. At the outbreak of war they moved for safety to South Wales with which they had earlier associations. After the war they returned to Kent, but in a fairly short time the name was lost to view." Those were the Days..... (sorry, that was a bit corny).

And that is currently all I can discover about Day's Menagerie. I should love to be able to find out more, and should be delighted to meet anyone who can fill in even a few gaps concerning the menagerie (I am afraid the circuses and fairs do not interest me), in fact if there is such a soul there is an invitation here to them to dine with us while they reveal all they know.

So the menageries have gone, and few indeed are they who are sorry, but they served their purpose, and as I wrote in WTLF, if it were in a way in which we no longer approve what of the medieval barber-surgeons who with their filthy knives and saws paved the way for our present-day neurological and cardiac units?

Footnote Shortly after writing this chapter I was extremely sorry to learn of the sudden and unexpected death of Phil Bates.