

The Exeter 'Change Tour of 1798

The four wagons of Gilbert Pidcock's menagerie rolled into Glasgow early in January 1798. In the eighteenth century Glasgow, rich from the tobacco trade, had expanded westwards from its ancient cathedral and university, and into a neatly laid out new suburb. The menagerie opened for business on land probably now part of George Square.

On Friday 5th January, the *Glasgow Advertiser* noted: *FOREIGN LIVING RARITIES. - There came into town this day from Greenock, four broad wheeled caravans, drawn by twenty horses, containing the largest assemblage of birds and beasts ever exhibited in this kingdom in the age or memory of man.*

The following day a rival newspaper, the *Glasgow Courier*, carried a detailed advertisement (Figure 2). The same advertisement with minor changes appeared on Monday 8th in the *Advertiser*. Presumably in response to complaints from proud Glaswegians, references to 'England' have been changed by the end of the week to 'Great Britain.' Such advertisements continued to appear for several weeks. I seem to remember a claim that George Wombwell was the first managerist to advertise in the press. This shows he was not, and I suggest that such claims - of the biggest, oldest, or longest variety - are best treated with caution.

Over and over again the press coverage mentioned Exeter 'Change. We can reasonably infer from this that by the 1790s Exeter 'Change was known far beyond London, even 400 miles north in Scotland. However, whilst this was not the first visit by a menagerie to these parts, there is nothing in the press record to indicate that Mr Pidcock's operation had visited Scotland before.

The advertisements highlight the following animals: Asiatic elephant, Bengal tiger, pelican, South American vulture, Imperial vulture, nilgai, African ram, and a two-headed heifer. The heifer sounds like the animal exhibited in 1791, and discussed by the great surgeon and anatomist, John Hunter (Note 3). This animal list may not be exhaustive: one newspaper refers to a variety of other animals and birds too numerous to insert.

I assume that the four wagons mentioned were all beast wagons, and the organ was in a separate vehicle, although it may be that there were only three beast wagons. Later in the tour we learn that the elephant wagon was drawn by eight horses, so presumably the other three beast wagons had four horses each.

It would appear that *The Advertiser* was particularly diverted by Mr Pidcock and his animals. On 15th January, it reported: *Merit ought to be rewarded; it is but a tribute due to Pidcock, the proprietor of living animals and birds at Exeter 'Change, that he deserves well of the public; they have seen it, for such a daily assemblage of rank and fashion that honour this popular exhibition with their presence is truly astonishing. We understand that the grand collection of Living Rarities, belonging to Mr Pidcock now exhibiting at the head of Miller Street, will, from a very distinguished encouragement received, be continued for a few days longer. This collection is certainly the most extensive and curious ever seen in this place.*

On 19th January, the *Advertiser* even published a ballad in honour of the menagerie (Figure 3). The author of the ballad is not given, and we should not dismiss the possibility that Gilbert Pidcock provided it himself. The ballad introduces further animals to our list, animals mentioned nowhere else: ostrich, savage Arabian (?), cassowary, panther, leopard, two sea animals, wolf, monkeys, cockatoos, and warbling birds.

An excellent poster, illustrated by the renowned Thomas Bewick of Newcastle, survives from the period (Figure 4). The poster, it seems, was pinned up as local advertising during peregrinations of the Exeter 'Change menagerie. It is dated 1795, and lists the contents of four wagons: Indian rhinoceros, Asiatic elephant, Grevy's zebra, African lion, Bengal tigers, leopards, hyaena, antelope, South American vulture, but no organ.

Some of the text of this poster is incorporated verbatim into the Glasgow press advertisements, and I suspect that it or something similar also appeared there. Are the animals mentioned in the ballad based on the exhibition itself, on a poster, or on the fancy of the anonymous poet? We may never know.

With his use of advertising, press stories and posters, Gilbert Pidcock demonstrates a remarkable flair for marketing. A further strategy was the production of Pidcock's Exhibition coin-like tokens, many of which have survived (Figure 1). There are tokens depicting the antelope, cockatoo, nilgai, ostrich, pelican, tiger, and two-headed cow, with others showing a beaver, crowned crane, lion, eagle, Indian rhinoceros, toucan, Grevy's zebra, to say nothing of the wanderoo. Elephant tokens seem to have been particularly popular, and provide us with a name; he was called James.

On 22nd January we learn that the Foreign Living Rarities will move the next day down to Glasgow's Old Bridge, about half a mile away. On 26th January, *those ladies, gentlemen, and others who have not yet paid a visit to these astonishing works of creation ought therefore to avail themselves of the last intimation, as it is probable they will never have another opportunity of viewing the same grand collection, or any other equally curious or so well entitled to admiration.*

On 28th January, Mr Pidcock is presented with a *most beautiful and extraordinarily fine bird, very large; it is not to be paralleled in this kingdom. It was taken by Captain Duncan Douglas of the ship Pandora, 400 miles from land, on his passage from Newfoundland to Greenock. This non-descript bird is variegated with a variety of beautiful colours and striped similar to those of the zebra, except the head, breast, legs, &c., which are entirely white.*

Finally, on 31st January, the four wagons set off for Falkirk, to exhibit there on 2nd and 3rd February, before continuing on to Stirling and then Edinburgh. The *Edinburgh Advertiser* of Tuesday 13th February takes up the story with an advertisement informing its readers that the menagerie was exhibiting at the 'Earthen Mound' in Edinburgh. The text of the advertisement is already familiar to us, with a few words added to introduce Captain Douglas's still-unidentified bird.

From subsequent press coverage we learn that the display was giving *more general satisfaction than any other hitherto exhibited in this city*, that the elephant was estimated to weigh nearly four tons and cost £1,000, and the tiger was nearly double

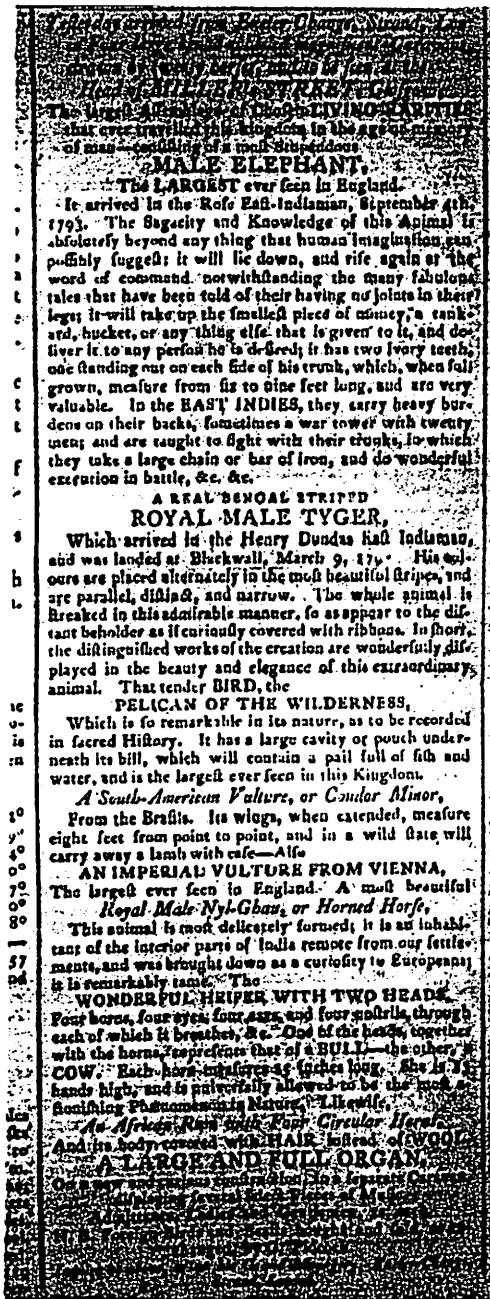
the size of any previously seen in North Britain. The menagerie was open from 11 am to 7 pm. The *Caledonian Mercury*, which carries more information about the menagerie than the other Edinburgh titles, prints the ballad.

Mr Pidcock's menagerie finally left the Mound on 17th March. It proceeded no further than Edinburgh's Grassmarket, before stopping there for a few more days. We first learn of Mr Pidcock's menagerie in the port of Greenock. I wondered whether it had travelled up to Scotland by boat, and perhaps headed south again from Edinburgh's port of Leith. However, the Edinburgh papers make it clear that the menagerie's route from Edinburgh was first to Dalkeith, and from there to Haddington, Dunbar, and Berwick, on the road southwards towards London.

Roger Edwards
Glasgow, Feb 2006
hystrix@hotmail.com



Figure 1 Pidcock elephant token,
c.1795 *Blackburn with
Darwen Borough Council*



Yesterday arrived from Exeter Change, Strand, London, in four large broad wheeled magnificent caravans, drawn by twenty horses, and to be seen at the head of Miller's Street, Glasgow, the largest assemblage of chosen Living Rarities that ever travelled this kingdom in the age or memory of man - consisting of a most stupendous male elephant, the largest ever seen in England. It arrived in the Rose East-Indiaman, September 4th. 1793. The sagacity and knowledge of this animal is absolutely beyond any thing that human imagination can possibly suggest; it will lie down, and rise again at the word of command notwithstanding the many fabulous tales that have been told of their having no joints in their legs; it will take up the smallest piece of money, a tankard, bucket, or any thing else that is given to it, and deliver it to any person he is desired; it has two ivory teeth, one standing out on each side of his trunk, which, when full grown, measure from six to nine feet long, and are very valuable. In the EAST INDIES, they carry heavy burdens on their backs, sometimes a war tower with twenty men; and are taught to fight with their trunks, in which they take a large chain or bar of iron, and do wonderful execution in battle, &c. &c.

A REAL BENGAL STRIPPED ROYAL MALE TYGER,

Which arrived in the Henry Dundas East-Indiaman, and was landed at Blackwall, March 9, 1794. His colours are placed alternately in the most beautiful stripes, and are parallel, distinct, and narrow. The whole animal is streaked in this admirable manner, so as appear to the distant beholder as if curiously covered with ribbons. In short, the distinguished works of the creation are wonderfully displayed in the beauty and elegance of this extraordinary animal. That tender BIRD, the

PELICAN OF THE WILDERNESS,

Which is so remarkable in its nature, as to be recorded in sacred History. It has a large cavity or pouch underneath its bill, which will contain a pail full of fish and water, and is the largest ever seen in this Kingdom.

A South-American Vulture, or Condor Minor,

From the Brazils. Its wings, when extended, measure eight feet from point to point, and in a wild state will carry away a lamb with ease.—Also

AN IMPERIAL VULTURE FROM VIENNA,

The largest ever seen in England. A most beautiful Royal Male Nyl-Gau, or Horned Horse,

This animal is most delicately formed; it is an inhabitant of the interior parts of India remote from our settlements, and was brought down as a curiosity to Europeans; it is remarkably tame. The

WONDERFUL HEIFER WITH TWO HEADS,

Four horns, four eyes, four ears, and four nostrils, through each of which it breathes, &c. One of the heads, together with the horns, represents that of a BULL - the other, a COW. Each horn measures 25 inches long. She is 13 hands high, and is universally allowed to be the most astonishing Phenomenon in Nature. Likewise,

An African Ram with Four Circular Horns,

And its body covered with HAIR, instead of WOOL.

A LARGE AND FULL ORGAN,

On a new and curious construction, in a separate caravan, displaying several select pieces of music. Admittance, Ladies and Gentlemen, 1s. each. N. B. Foreign birds and beasts bought and sold, or exchanged, by G. Pidcock. Enquire as above, or at his Grand Menagerie, Exeter-Change, Strand, London

Figure 2 Glasgow Courier, 6 Jan 1798
Photo: D. Warrillow.

A NEW SONG,
UPON THE EXHIBITION IN MILLER STREET.
To the tune of *'Bachelor's Hall.'*

Amateurs, cognoscenti, and lovers of merit,
O haste, and reward then both genius and spirit;
Tis Pidcock I mean, who deserves public praise,
His labours shall be the just theme of my lays,
No longer let gewgaws and trifles attract,
On good sense and prudence he would not exact.

Chorus.

Haste away, haste away, to Pidcock's repair,
And view his Collection both pleasing and rare,
And view, &c.

II.

Each day monsters start up in this curious age,
And Horses and Elephants grace our grand stage;
While Pidcock more modestly acts a wife part,
Depends on dame Nature, not trusting to Art -
To that goddess alone, with his curious Collection,
He hopes to obtain the Public's protection.

Chorus. Haste away, &c.

III.

The beautiful Pelican claims your delight,
And an Ostrich of nine feet enraptures your sight;
A Savage Arabian next puts in his claim,
Says - many beholders more merit his name;
The R. yil Nyl-Ghaw, or fine Horned Horse,
More cornuto's you see at a horse-race or course.

Chorus. Haste away, &c.

IV.

The Grand Cassowary, sans tongue, wings, and tail,
O'er the mind of the curious is sure to prevail;
No doubt there are many, on this stage of life,
With no tongue, but wings, to a shrew of a wife.
The Tiger and Panther are surely a feast,
For each must be rank'd a most beautiful beast.

Chorus. Haste away, &c.

V.

Sea Animals (two), a fierce Leopard likewise,
And a ravenous Wolf that would tear out your eyes.
Here are Birds that will warble as if on the spray,
Your moments to 'guile, and appease sad dismay;
And the Monkeys and Cockatoos chatter and clatter,
Their counterparts cannot unravel the matter.

Chorus. Haste away, &c.

VI.

Though last, yet not least, here's a wonderful Cow
With two heads; says Paddy, O that a Bull, how?
For, och! 'pon my conscience, since I came from Louth,
I ne'er saw a Cow open more than one mouth.
So, if Pidcock has rarities as he expresses,
He's surely deserving of daily caresses.

Chorus. Haste away, &c.

Amateurs, cognoscenti, and lovers of merit,
O haste, and reward then both genius and spirit;
Tis Pidcock I mean, who deserves public praise,
His labours shall be the just theme of my lays,
No longer let gewgaws and trifles attract,
On good sense and prudence he would not exact.

Chorus.

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Each day monsters start up in this curious age,
And horses and elephants grace our grand stage;
While Pidcock more modestly acts a wife part,
Depends on dame Nature, not trusting to Art -
To that goddess alone, with his curious collection,
He hopes to obtain the public's protection.

Chorus.

III

The beautiful pelican claims your delight,
And an ostrich of nine feet enraptures your sight;
A savage Arabian next puts in his claim,
Says - many beholders more merit his name;
The royal nilgai, or fine horned horse,
More cornuto's you see at a horse-race or course.

Chorus.

IV

The grand cassowary, sans tongue, wings, and tail,
O'er the mind of the curious is sure to prevail;
No doubt there are many, on this stage of life,
With no tongue, but wings, to a shrew of a wife.
The tiger and panther are surely a feast,
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And a ravenous wolf that would tear out your eyes.
Here are birds that will warble as if on the spray,
Your moments to 'guile, and appease sad dismay;
And the monkeys and cockatoos chatter and clatter,
Their counterparts cannot unravel the matter.

Chorus.

VI

Though last, yet not least here's a wonderful cow
With two heads; says Paddy, O that a bull, how?
For, och! 'pon my conscience, since I came from Louth,
I ne'er saw a cow open more than one mouth.
So, if Pidcock has rarities as he expresses,
He's surely deserving of daily caresses.

Chorus.

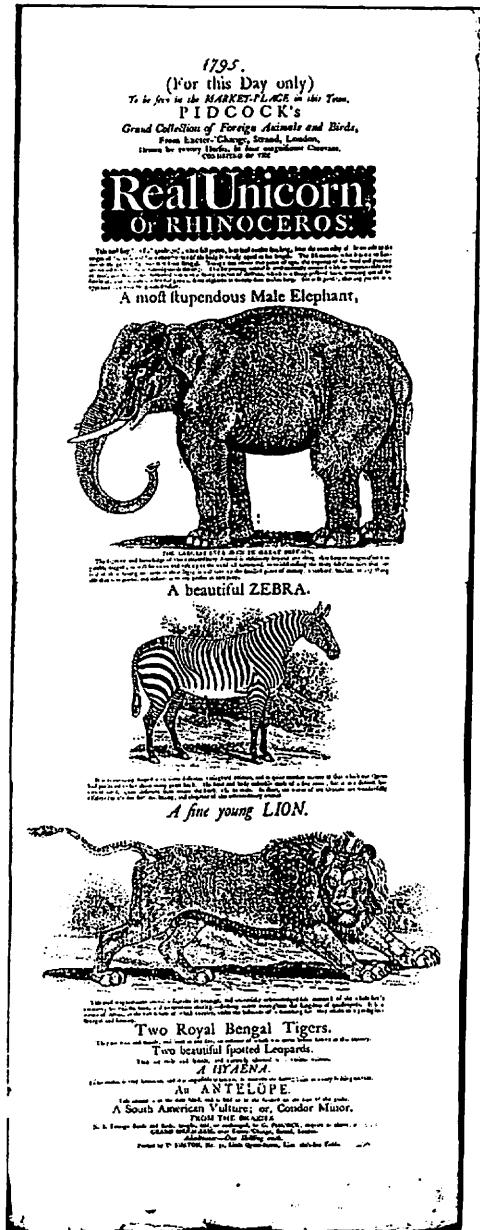


Figure 4 Theatre Museum collection.

1795. (For this day only) to be seen in the market-place in this town, Pidcock's grand collection of foreign animals and birds, from Exeter-Change, Strand, London, drawn by twenty horses, in four magnificent caravans, consisting of the **real unicorn or rhinoceros**. This most singular of all quadrupeds, when full grown, is at least twelve feet long, from the extremity of the muzzle to the origin of the tail, and the circumference of his body is nearly equal to his length. The rhinoceros which came to London in the year 17(8?)9 was sent from Bengal. Though not above two years of age, the expense of his food and journey amounted to near one thousand pounds sterling. This surprising animal is most curiously covered with an impenetrable coat of mail, and Nature has furnished him with a strong weapon of defence, which is a sharp-pointed horn, growing out of his forehead, and measures, when full grown, from eighteen to twenty-four inches long. He is so gentle, that any person may approach him with the greatest safety. A **most stupendous male elephant**, the largest ever seen in Great Britain. The sagacity and knowledge of this extraordinary animal is absolutely beyond anything that human imagination can possibly suggest; it will lie down and rise up at the word of command, notwithstanding the many fabulous tales that are told of their having no joints in their legs; it will take up the smallest piece of money, a tankard, bucket, or anything else that is required, and deliver it to an person in company. A **beautiful zebra**. It is remarkably striped with three different variegated colours, and is quite another variety to that which our Queen had presented to her about thirty years back. His head and body resemble those of a fine horse; but it is a distinct species of itself, quite different from either the horse, ass, or mule. In short, the works of the Creator are wonderfully displayed in the fine features, and elegance of this extraordinary animal. A **fine young lion**. This most magnanimous animal is superior in courage, and universally acknowledged sole monarch of the whole brute creation; his majestic look, and tremendous roaring, - striking terror throughout the kingdom of quadrupeds. It is a native of Africa, in the vast deserts of which country, under the influence of a scorching sun, they attain to a prodigious strength and ferocity. Two **royal Bengal tigers**. They are male and female, and both in one den, an instance of which was never before known in this country. Two **beautiful spotted leopards**. They are male and female, and curiously adorned with various colours. A **hyæna**. This animal is very ferocious, and it is impossible to tame it. It imitates the human voice in a very striking manner. An **antelope**. This animal is of the deer kind, and is said to be the swiftest on the face of the globe. A **South American Vulture; or, Condor Minor**, from the Brazils. N.B. Foreign beasts and birds, bought, sold, or exchanged, but G. Pidcock: enquire as above, or at his Grand Menagerie, over Exeter-Change, Strand, London Admittance - One Shilling each.

Printed by T. Burton, No. 31, Little Queen-Street,
Lincoln's Inn Fields.

NOTES:

1. Modern spelling has been substituted in the quotations.
2. Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Mr David Warrillow of Glasgow for drawing my attention to the original advertisement, and providing a photograph of it. I would also like to thank the Theatre Museum and Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council for permission to reproduce their images of artefacts in their collections.
3. London Chronicle, January 1791. *"Now exhibiting at the Lyceum Strand. The surprising heifer with two heads. This very remarkable creature has two heads, four horns, four ears, four nostrils, through each of which it breathes. This truly wonderful curiosity is the only one of the kind in Europe; and what is more astonishing, it takes its sustenance with both mouths at the same time, to the admiration of the faculty, and the beholders in general; and it is also the received opinion of John Hunter, Esq., Professor of Anatomy, that it has two hearts. One of the heads, together with the horns, represents that of a bull, and the other a cow. The height of the animal is thirteen hands, and each horn measures twenty-five inches long. - as quoted on www.thegalloper.com.*
4. Pidcock's Exhibition tokens. The tokens seem to date from 1795, with a later issue in 1801. Many such tokens are advertised on the internet. The Blackburn elephant token is atypical - the ears large and the name omitted.

TWO FOOTNOTES BY CLIN KEELING

See page 3: the newspaper report on the Exeter 'Change Tour of 1798, dated 28th January, mentions the presentation of an unidentified bird. Apart from the "beautiful colours", which in all probability were showman's hype (a form of hyperbole not completely unknown today), this is otherwise a reasonable description of a female Snowy Owl, while its mode of acquisition - i.e. planing down onto a ship in a northerly latitude, is almost unique to the species.

See page 16: the *Evening Times* report on the opening of the Scottish Zoo mentions an Elephant named Piccaninny. An interesting point here. When Jumbo was tragically run down and killed at St. Thomas, Ontario on 15th September 1885, he was accompanied by another (very small) Elephant, which was also struck by the engine, resulting in a broken leg. This was successfully splinted and treated - a terrific achievement for the time, in fact it would be considered excellent stockmanship and veterinary care today. The animal's name? Piccaninny! Which makes you think.

Mr Miles' Exeter 'Change Tour

Some years ago my attention was drawn to ballad texts as a source of information about early animal collections. It has taken me seven years to take this advice on board, but recently I investigated the broadsheet collection in Glasgow's Mitchell Library. Sadly, I drew a blank with the ballads. I did, however, come across two handbills about Mr Miles. Although bound separately in the portfolio, they clearly belong together.

You will notice that the area chosen by Mr Miles to display his collection is beside the Old Bridge, the site used by Gilbert Pidcock in 1798. Late eighteenth century maps of Glasgow show a strip of open ground beside the River Clyde to the west of Glasgow's mediaeval bridge.

Dating this tour has not proved straightforward. I have failed to find any newspaper coverage of the visit. The *Miles and Polito Menagerie* at the Bartholomew Fair in 1799 was also in six caravans (www.thegalloper.com). This tour probably took place in the following decade. The siege of Seringpatam in 1799 marked the capitulation of Mysore. Presumably, animal collectors followed in the wake of the military once things had settled down a bit. It is unlikely that these handbills were printed before 1805; the long 's' is not used - the *Glasgow Herald* (for example) replaced this with the short 's' in August 1805 when the paper changed hands on the death of the proprietor. The latest possible year would be 1822, when Robert Chapman, the printer, retired.

Roger Edwards
Glasgow, Feb 2006
hystrix@hotmail.com

THE TWO HANDBILLS ARE REPRODUCED OVERLEAF.