

WHERE THE LEOPARD LAZED

BY

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With valuable assistance from GWYN GRIFFITHS.

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TRAVELLING RHINOCEROSES

Long ago, 'way back in the 1950s, the only real authority on the records and histories of captive Rhinoceroses - especially the Asiatic species - was Richard J. Reynolds, of Atlanta, Georgia; during the mid-1960s I corresponded with him and, rather surprisingly, was able to give him details of some previously unrecorded specimens. Far later, in the early 1980s a young Dutchman, Dr. Kees Rookmaaker, who has similar interests, came upon the scene and, although I say it as shouldn't, between us we made quite a good job of recording for posterity much of the captive Rhinoceros history that otherwise might well have remained buried and forgotten for ever. Although a true researcher knows full well his or her job is never really done, I suppose it's safe to say we felt quite pleased with ourselves.

I've always been a great one for metaphors - so picture three little boys trying to fly a new kite - and although they aren't doing too badly the thing isn't behaving quite as it ought. Then, up strides someone who takes one look at what they are doing, says "Here, let a man come, and show you how to do it", relieves them of their kite and immediately and expertly causes it to soar and swoop far above them, eliciting awe and admiration at his expertise.

Yes, I feel it's safe to say Gwyn has shown us up somewhat...

Travelling menagerists were ever seeking to obtain for exhibition the spectacular and the strange - exactly the sort of animals their present-day counterparts fight shy of, unless they are, whisper the magic word, "endangered" - and Gwyn puts it very succinctly when he writes they "were always looking for the eye-catching, the fierce, the mysterious and the rare", which shows they clearly wanted to attract large numbers of visitors to their shows, being sensible folk. He goes on "At different times various species were viewed as particularly attractive exhibits. However, the Rhinoceros - normally Rhinoceros unicornis - was arguably the star animal for any menagerie to possess and offer to public view."

This is a valid point, as although Elephants were larger and more endearing they were things most people were familiar with - i.e. they could recognise one before seeing one alive, they'd seen them in pictures, they knew of some of the things they could do - but the Indian Rhinoceros was that much larger than life; it's bigger than you expect it to be, and it's spectacularly "put-together", what an artist would term visually interesting. Although it was common at the time - one

Indian maharajah has the dubious "distinction" of having shot and killed five in one morning - it was difficult to capture alive and unhurt, and there's evidence it was what might be called a poor sailor, so it's small wonder that few reached these shores alive in those days, and that high prices would be asked for those who survived the voyage from Calcutta. Which is why the vast majority in this country were shown by its largest travelling menagerie - Wombwell's...

At this juncture - although it's often been recorded before - it isn't out of place to remind the reader of its somewhat complicated history: George Wombwell (1777-1850) started exhibiting animals around 1806, and very soon built up the then most impressive travelling menagerie in the world - in fact by the time of his death he'd divided it into three separate and more or less independent outfits, known as Nos.1, 2 and 3. In his will he bequeathed No.1 to his widow (more of this later), No.2 to a niece, the redoubtable Mrs. Edmonds, while a nephew, also George Wombwell, received No.3: the latter was dispersed as early as 1855, No.1 at the famous Edinburgh sale of 1872, while No.2 - then known as "Edmonds', late Wombwell's Menagerie" - continued until 1884. Then the Bostocks came upon the furry scene, but really I haven't time to deviate from the subject like this...

For practical reasons Gwyn has "named" certain individuals in this, his survey of the Indian Rhinoceros as a travelling menagerie subject during the last century, which is easily the most comprehensive of its kind anywhere.

1807 A poster in London's Guildhall Library indicates that Wombwell exhibited a Rhinoceros at that year's Bartholomew Fair - although Gwyn tells me he has some reservations about its dating as it seems rather surprising that Wombwell should have been able to obtain such an expensive rarity only two or three years after starting up.

1816 He certainly had one during Christmas week of that year, as it was exhibited as "the only animal of its kind in Europe" (Norfolk Chronicle, 21/12/1816) at Castle Ditches, Norwich. Gwyn calls this the "1816 Rhinoceros".

1818 A Rhinoceros - which I mention in WICD, p.38 - was at Boughton Green Fair, near Kettering, Northamptonshire, in June of that year: "It was purchased by the Proprietor for the enormous Sum of 800 Guineas, being the only Animal of its Kind in Europe" (advertisement in the Northampton Mercury, 13/6/1818).

In December of that year Wombwell showed a Rhinoceros - "The only one living in Europe" - on Castle Hill, Norwich (Norfolk Chronicle, 12/12/1818).

There can be little doubt that the animals advertised in 1818 were, in fact, the "1816 Rhinoceros", which would appear to have died over the next few years, as Wombwell's next visit to Boughton Green Fair, in June 1823, was preceded by a detailed advertisement that made no mention of a Rhinoceros.

1836 Then follows a lengthy period when the chance to acquire a new specimen seems to have eluded him - in fact it isn't until 1836 that we come upon another poster in the Guildhall Library which indicates that Wombwell was exhibiting another Rhinoceros, again at the Bartholomew bun-fight. This one has been dubbed "The Cashmore Rhinoceros" and I mention it, although not under that name, in WIMP, p.15, stating that the Cambridge Chronicle for 18/11/1836 said "In June last the ... One Horned Rhinoceros... was purchased by Mr. Wombwell at enormous expense; it had not been in his possession more than a month before it died." Wombwell had the animal "stuffed, and the bones articulated by Mr. Cashmore of Birmingham", and the resulting exhibit was displayed in the menagerie.

Gwyn: "This account raises a number of questions. I assume that the reference to "June last" indicates 1836, though it could perhaps refer to 1835. And what form did the animal take after Cashmore had done his work? My suspicion is that Wombwell gained both a stuffed exhibit and a skeleton in exchange for the cadaver. Two exhibits from one! This stuffed and/or skeletal specimen was presumably the Rhinoceros advertised at the 1836 Bartholomew Fair."

1837 This specimen, about which we know next to nothing, might have arrived during the spring of this year. Gwyn calls it the "Ashford Rhinoceros", and writes:

"In May 1837 Wombwell offered a Rhinoceros skeleton to Cambridge University Museum. Was this the "Cashmore Rhinoceros"? Why was he keen to sell? The answer to the first question is surely 'yes', but the second poses more difficulty. It may be that he felt showing both the stuffed remains and a skeleton was an unattractive duplication. However, it may be that he had now acquired a new, living Rhinoceros, which rendered the dead specimens redundant.

"This new beast is recorded in a letter of January 1838 - from Ashford, Kent - in which Wombwell offered Cambridge University Museum a "female Rhinoceros which died yesterday morning in a fit". Could this female have arrived in spring 1837, prompting the attempt to sell the skeleton?"

Most interestingly, at Cambridge University Museum there is still a skeleton, assigned "Rhinoceros unicornis = indicus", described by it as "bones from Wombwell's Menagerie". Could they be the remains of the Cashmore animal?

At this juncture, then, Wombwell had owned at least three, perhaps four, identified Rhinoceroses, each of which had died in his collection. However, he may have retained mounted and/or skeletal exhibits based on either (or both!) of the Cashmore and Ashford specimens. Therefore, when we learn that later in 1838 he showed "a Rhinoceros" at Bartholomew Fair (September) and in Plymouth (November) it must be borne in mind these could have been dead ones.

1839 However there's no doubt at all that in the February of this year a living animal - the "Hull Rhinoceros" - had been added to the

collection: it was "a remarkably fine male One-Horned Rhinoceros, lately obtained at enormous expense" according to the Hull Advertiser, and was on show at Dock End, Mytongate, Hull. This just may have been the Bartholomew Fair/Plymouth animal of late 1838, depending on Wombwell's interpretation of "lately".

This was almost certainly the same animal on display at 1839's Bartholomew Fair, and in Sheffield in the December.

1840 A poster in the Guildhall Library and Keeling (in WTCD, p.38) both agree that a Rhinoceros was shown at the Bartholomew Fair in the early autumn of that year.

1841 A "Great One Horned Rhinoceros, the finest in Europe" was exhibited in Cambridge, according to the Cambridge Chronicle for 27/2/1841; it also appeared at Aberdeen, Elgin and as far north as Inverness - which could be the most northerly point reached by a captive Rhinoceros in Great Britain.

In July of the following year "the male One Horned Rhinoceros... the only one ever seen in Wales" was advertised for display in Swansea and several other towns in South Wales.

As Gwyn shrewdly implies: "In the absence of any other evidence it seems likeliest that these were all the 'Hull Rhinoceros'."

1842 saw the acquisition of a very remarkable Rhinoceros, purchased for 265 guineas (compare this with the 800 guineas of 1816!), at the sale of the short-lived (1838-1842) Manchester Zoological Garden - vide WTLT.

To be known henceforth as the "Manchester Rhinoceros", together with "Hull", it allowed Wombwell to exhibit the species in two of his menageries.

For some reason comparatively little Wombwell material from this decade has survived, although we know that menageries of his featuring a Rhinoceros visited Exeter in 1845, and Bolton (WIMP, p.16) on New Year's Day 1848, while in the July of that year a note in the Wombwell No.1 Log Book states a "Rhinoceros waggon came" when the menagerie was at Stourbridge, Worcestershire, confirming a) they had such an animal and b) it must have hitherto been somewhat inadequately accommodated. In September a Rhinoceros visited Somerset with a Wombwell menagerie - almost certainly No.1.

1850 was a doubly significant year, as - first - it marked the death of Wombwell and, secondly, it provides confirmation of two Rhinoceroses in two separate Wombwell menageries.

In the summer of that year the No.1 Menagerie visited Scotland, and the surviving Log Book tells us that a "Rhinoceros died" at Falkirk, but references from Scottish newspapers (apparently unearthed by Mr. Roger Edwards, present Archivist of the Glasgow Zoological Garden) give a fuller and somewhat different account. In July the show was at Glasgow

Fair, offering "a Rhinoceros" among its attractions, but a press account in mid-August recorded that "a blank has been created at Wombwell's splendid collection, now being exhibited in Paisley, by the death of the female Rhinoceros. It died on Sabbath morning (probably 11th August). It had been in the possession of the renowned collector for nine years, and cost him £1,000."

Meanwhile the No.3 was touring West and South Wales in June and July, also with a Rhinoceros which was described as "the first time of its being exhibited in this part of the country for the last seven years." Over to Gwyn:

"It is tempting to assume that these two animals were the Hull and Manchester Rhinos - though it is impossible to be certain which might be which. The suggestion that the Paisley victim - it is now clear that the animal died before the menagerie reached Falkirk - had been with Wombwell's for nine years implies acquisition in 1841, which does not entirely accord with it being either the Hull (1839) or Manchester (1842) Rhinos. It is also worth pointing out that the Hull Rhino had been described as a male in 1839, while the Paisley beast was said to be a female - though sexing by the press has not always been accurate! One must also consider the possibility that the No.2 might also have had a Rhino at this period. As we shall shortly see, there are suggestions that "Manchester" was with the No.2 menagerie by 1858 - so perhaps the "West Wales Rhinoceros" was an entirely separate, third Wombwell animal?

"The issue is further clouded by two discoveries from 1851. First, that the No.3, touring Somerset in August, had no Rhino. Second, that an American menagerist, G.C. Quick & Co., had a Rhino in that year "purchased from Wombwell". Again, it is tempting to jump to the conclusion that George Wombwell's No.3 had sold their "West Wales" Rhino to America - but the evidence for this is purely circumstantial. We must also realise the Quick Rhino could have been a preserved specimen, might have passed only briefly through Wombwell hands as a dealer, or may never have had any connection with Wombwell at all - as the Wombwell name was highly valued in Britain, and "borrowed" by other menagerists.

"In 1855 the No.3 menagerie, by now a mere shadow of what it had formerly been, was dispersed, with no mention of a Rhino. In the same year the No.1 visited Plymouth (WTEW, p.13) and Bolton - again with no mention of a Rhino. Indeed there is no evidence of No.1 ever replacing the Falkirk death of 1850 prior to its 1872 dispersal.

"Any continuing connection between Wombwell's and the Rhino was to be restricted to the No.2, now known as "Edmonds, late Wombwell's Menagerie". Unfortunately, very few records of the No.2 have survived. An advertisement from 1857 makes no reference to a Rhinoceros, but does not include a full listing so cannot be considered conclusive. Certainly, in 1858 Frank Buckland, on a visit to the Edmonds Menagerie at Windsor, claimed to have seen a specimen purchased from the Manchester Zoological Garden 21 years earlier for £1,400. Both price and date were incorrect - but could this have been "Manchester"? The 21 years may have been a reference to its age rather than its time with the menagerie, and the price another piece of showman's flannel." (Interes-

tingly, two Edmonds posters from this period survive - one from 1860, the other undated but probably 1859. Both list a Rhinoceros which "weighs upwards of five tons" - an exaggerated figure, but which suggests a large mature specimen.)

"There is one possible difficulty with Buckland's Rhino being the former Manchester Zoological Garden beast. Buckland recorded that "he always rides in his van, being a valuable animal and worth his carriage", implying the animal was a male (which would be consistent with it being a large animal). However, a Manchester Zoological Garden guidebook of 1840 lists a female Rhinoceros! (If I may interrupt here, Gwyn old son, at the risk of receiving a right hook to the jaw from Germaine Greer, should our paths ever cross, I, for one, am inclined to refer to an animal as "he" if I'm not certain of its sex.)

"In March 1865, visiting Cambridge, the menagerie still offered a Rhinoceros - the long-lived Manchester animal perhaps - but by February 1866 the animal had vanished from the list of attractions. For the first time since 1838/39 it would seem that the Wombwell menageries (by now only two remained) could offer no Rhinos to visitors.

"How are we to piece together the information we have for the 1839 to 1865 period? It is tempting to suggest that two animals were involved. The first, "Hull", arriving in 1838/9, then touring with No.1 until its 1850 death. The second, "Manchester", purchased in 1842, touring with No.3 (1850) and then No.2 (1858-65), before dying in 1865/66. However, if we accept this approach what are we to make of the 1851 Quick animal? We must also accept the possibility that it was the Hull animal (a male?) which survived to be seen by Buckland, and the Manchester Rhino (a female?) which died at Paisley.

"Perhaps the "three animal" theory is more plausible, "Hull" staying with No.1 from 1838/9 to 1850, "Manchester" with No.2 from 1842 to 1865/6 - again we must recognise the possibility that these animals "swapped identities" between 1839 and 1850 - and a third animal, "West Wales", with No.3 in 1850 before passing to the U.S.A. What we really need is a No.2 menagerie guidebook /poster of 1850 to establish the presence or absence of a Rhino at that period.

"It was to be 1870 before Rhinos returned to a Wombwell menagerie, in the form of a true pair - the "Alumberg Rhinoceroses" - landed in London from the ship "Alumberg" on 20th May 1870 and quickly added to the Edmonds Menagerie, in which they were described as "Great One Horned Indian Rhinoceroses". (That the No.1 was still Rhinoless is confirmed by advertisements of 1867, 1869 and 1870.) One of this pair survived to 1876, featuring in a guidebook of that year; the fate of the other is unknown."

Thus the Wombwell Rhinoceroses: there were, in fact, literally one or two others, the most famous being the mysterious animal owned by Thomas Atkins, who seems to have obtained it some time during the 1820s. Around 1832 this gentleman took his show off the road, and opened the

Liverpool Zoological Garden - from which, somewhat unexpectedly, this animal was occasionally "hired out" - there's no other term for it - in the winter of 1835/36 to Glasgow, Edinburgh and even Dublin. This is the animal thought to have been a Javan Rhinoceros (Rhinoceros sondaicus) and which I discuss in some detail in the chapter on the Liverpool Zoological Garden in WILT, although Kees Rookmaaker has fairly recently produced a well-researched paper casting doubt on this early identification and suggesting it was only a small example of unicornis, after all. I've recorded elsewhere that this animal's remains are currently in the British Museum (Natural History), as a manikin inside a mounted Indian Rhinoceros, but Gwyn, who has recently made some enquiries there, informs me that the specimen(s) in question were destroyed long ago. (Gwyn, my lad, don't believe everything that place tells you, sshhh...)

Another mystery surrounds an Indian Rhinoceros, complete with correct scientific name, that appears in the 1864 Manders' guidebook, implying they had one on show, but none of the usual specific details are given, such as date of arrival, etc., and there's no supporting evidence such as posters or press material. On the other hand, as I've pointed out before, Manders', for all their foibles, were not in the habit of advertising what they hadn't got, so I don't quite know what to make of this. Gwyn, however, is definitely sceptical.

Although they are perhaps intruding here, as there's no evidence they ever took to the road, no fewer than three Indian Rhinoceroses were shown at the Exeter 'Change in the 19th Century. The first arrived c.1810, was sold four years later, and then spent the next quarter of a century touring Europe! (I could be quite wrong here, but I believe this became known as the "Tornerier Rhinoceros", after its French owner - and it's interesting to note that the specific name of the Pancake Tortoise is torneriei.) Then came another in 1815, but shortly afterwards removed to Paris (Le Jardin des Plantes?) and - by an incredible stroke of fate, while writing this book, I located what I think is not only an unrecorded Indian Rhinoceros - but an Exeter 'Change one, too! This was added to the collection c.1819, but I'll have more to say about it in another chapter.

These, then, are the basics of this truly magnificent animal as a travelling menagerie subject in this country from 1807 until about 1876 - thanks mainly to Gwyn Griffiths of Basford, Cheshire.

Oh, just as a point of interest, how many are there in the country today? Just four - 1,2,3,4.