

WAS KATHLEEN GUILTY?

Of the innumerable strange events that have gone towards the making of the fascinating story of the London Zoological Garden, that concerning the death of Peter, a very young African Elephant, has always struck me as one of the strangest.

He arrived at R.P. as a presentation, on 11th August 1928, and was given a very young - in fact little more than a calf - Black Rhinoceros named Kathleen as a companion. Normally a Goat was - still is? - provided as a companion for a lonely young mammal, but here was a decided departure from the norm.

On 29th July 1929, it was reported that Kathleen had made a savage and seemingly unprovoked attack on Peter which resulted in his suffering a broken scapular thus rendering him unable to stand. He was removed to the infant - if not embryonic - Whipsnade (which didn't open until two years later) on the 30th July: he died there on 1st August.

Frankly, I've never believed that Kathleen was physically capable of doing this amount of damage - in fact I've a half-formed idea he might have slipped on, say, a wet concrete or stone floor, while I find the "reasoning" to move him to Whipsnade, which would have involved a most uncomfortable road journey, absolutely inexplicable. At that time the Z.S.L. possessed a large and reasonably well equipped sanatorium at R.P. (at the rear of the present Bird House) whereas Whipsnade had no veterinary facilities of any kind, or indeed even anywhere to house just a young Elephant, so why was this extraordinary decision taken? It's a rhetorical question, as we'll probably never know the answer. The fact remains it looks almost as though R.P. wanted desperately to get poor Peter off its hands PDQ - as per my somewhat suspicious mind!

I've recently obtained this photograph of the two animals. Note that Peter appears to be a Forest Elephant (*cyclotis*) while Kathleen's horn looks incapable of hurting anything! Incidentally, she grew to adulthood at R.P.

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