

New information on Indian rhinoceroses (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in Britain in the mid-eighteenth century

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ABSTRACT: Three Indian rhinoceroses (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) were present in Britain in the mid-eighteenth century. The first, a female, arrived in 1737, the second, a male, arrived in 1739, the third, a female known as Douwe Mout's rhinoceros or Clara, was shown in London, probably in 1756. Recent research in British newspapers provides new information about all three animals, and produces evidence to show that the rhinoceros exhibited in London in 1751–1752 was not Clara, but the female which had arrived in 1737.

KEY WORDS : East India Company – shipping – Bengal – London – Douwe Mout – Clara.

THE FIRST FEMALE RHINOCEROS

The first female rhinoceros arrived in England on 1 October 1737 on board the *Shaftesbury* East Indiaman commanded by Captain Matthew Bookey; her male companion had died on the voyage. The ship left Calcutta on 4 October 1736 and sailed on to Madras; left Madras on 10 January 1737 and reached the Downs on 12 September 1737.¹ George Edwards' copy of a watercolour of the male drawn by an East India Company official is in the British Museum.²

Rookmaaker (1997) has suggested that a cutting from an unknown newspaper in the John Johnson Collection refers to this animal:

N o w t o b e S E E N ,
At the George Inn in the Hay-market, at Is. each Person,

A Great Female **RHINOCEROS**, landed within a Month from on board the *Shaftesbury*, from the East Indies. This extraordinary Animal is in its full Strength and Beauty, being four Years old, and in Heighth four Feet n'ne Inches, and nine Feet and three Inches round her Body; she has a large Horn on her Nose, and three Hoofs to each Foot; its Skin is scaled all over, and so hard and well folded as to secure from any Hurt by other Beasts, and not hinder its Motions.

If any Person is dispos'd to treat for it; they may deliver their Proposals at the Inn, directed to Capt. Canet, the Owner.

The date of 1756 assigned to this cutting in the John Johnson Collection³, is almost certainly wrong, the rhino's age and size suggest that 1739 is more likely.

The female was on show in London in November 1740 in competition, as we shall see, with the male, which was promoted as "being of the Male Kind . . . much more curious than the Female that has been lately advertiz'd" (Anonymous 1740). In writing about the male

James Parsons (1743: 535) was equally dismissive, “We need say no more of the Female Rhinoceros . . .”.

By 5 December 1741, and probably before, the female could be seen at the Unicorn in Oxford Road (Anonymous 1741). The advertisement stated that she was brought on board the *Shaftesbury* and that she was now six years old, as well as “being upwards of five Foot high, twelve feet round the Body, and twelve Feet two Inches from the Nose to the Rump”, which reads like an updated version of the George Inn advertisement. However new information is added, “She travell’d a thousand Leagues by Land through the Great Mogul’s Dominions in Bengal; from whence she was brought here on board the *Shaftesbury* . . .”. This additional wording could be taken to suggest that the ownership of the rhino had changed, that is that Captain Canet (about whom nothing is known) had succeeded in selling her. She was very soon taken off on tour, for only a month later, on 6 January 1742, she was on show at the White Hart Inn in Derby, 112 miles north of London.

This extraordinary animal is five years old; she is five foot and a half high, 18 foot two inches round the body, and 14 foot two inches from the Nose to the Rump, and is not yet come to her full growth: She has travell’d a Thousand Leagues by Land, thro’ the Great MOGUL’S Dominions to Bengal from whence it was brought over on Board the *Shaftesbury*, Captain Bookey. She is upwards of Forty Hundred Weight, has a large Horn on her Nose, three Hoofs on each Foot, and a Hide thick with Scales, Pistol proof . . . (Anonymous 1742a)

Although this advertisement clearly relates to the same animal, which has increased in size, it states that she was five years old, however, as demonstrated below, showmen were not always sticklers for accuracy. The female was shown in Burton-on-Trent and Lichfield in Staffordshire before returning to Derby in December 1742 (Anonymous 1742c). She must have been the rhinoceros drawn by William Twiddy “who never had the use of Hands or Feet” in Norwich on 1 June 1744 (Clarke 1986: 46, figure 26). The female rhinoceros is next heard of in Edinburgh in November 1747 at “George Ramsay’s Stabler at the Black Horse, Canongate”. The long gap in the records can be explained by the fact that, unlike the newspapers published in London, only a few provincial papers were actually in existence at this early period, some have yet been digitized and there are gaps in the digitized records. By the time of her presence in Edinburgh, the weight of “The noble Female RHINOCEROS . . . taken by the famous Kouli Kan from the Great Mogul”, had reached seventy hundredweight. She was shown with a buffalo, a mandrill, a wolf and a performing ape, “with many more [animals] too tedious to mention” (Anonymous 1747a, 1747b). In March 1749 she was in Nottingham with “a surprising CROCODILE Alive, taken on the Banks of the River Nile” (Anonymous 1749).

Towards the end of August 1751 both the female rhino, now weighing in at 80 hundredweight (just over four metric tons) and the crocodile were in London, shown at Bartholomew Fair (Frost 1874: 167), then at the Red Lion, Charing Cross on 28 November (Anonymous 1751a). Both animals were mentioned as being on show in London in the *Gentleman’s magazine* (Anonymous 1751b). They both remained at the Red Lion, throughout December until March 1752 (Anonymous 1752a, 1752b, 1752c, 1752d), when the rhino was transferred to the King’s Arms in Leadenhall Street (Anonymous 1752e, 1752f).

While the female rhino was on show in London in 1752, she was seen and drawn by George Edwards, and illustrated in colour in his *Gleanings of natural history* (Edwards 1758: no. 221); the plate (Figure 1) includes an image of the penis of the male rhino, which died on board the *Shaftesbury*. Two versions of this plate had been published previously (on

14 September 1752), one with and one without the penis.⁴ The rhino “with a single horn” was also seen by John Hill in 1752 or 1751, “There is one now kept as a shew in London, in which the horn is not more than three inches high, and obtuse, which is owing to the creature’s continually rubbing it down against the walls and boards of the place where it is kept” (Hill 1752: 567).

It has been claimed that the rhinoceros exhibited in London in 1751–1752 was Clara (Rookmaaker 1973: 55–56, 1998: 66; Clarke 1986: 63). The only evidence for this seems to be the statement by Buffon and Daubenton (1754: 176 footnote), that the rhinoceros drawn by Edwards was the animal that they had seen in Paris in 1749. This would be a reasonable assumption if, as seems probable, they were unaware of the existence of the female that had arrived in England in 1737 which was alive and well and living in London in 1752. It should be added that Jean-Baptiste Oudry’s painting of Clara in Paris in 1749, probably commissioned by Buffon, differs in many details from Edwards’ image. However the similarity in wording of the advertisements relating to the 1737 female both before and during 1752, and the continued presence of the crocodile on display with her, show that she, and not Clara, was the animal present in London at this time. In May she was offered for sale in Southwark:

The Noble Female Rhinoceros or real Unicorn and Crocodile alive, that has been seen so universally applauded, by all the Nobility and Gentry that has yet had the pleasure of seeing them: And six other curious Beasts are to be seen or sold, at the Talbot Inn, in the Borrough, Southwark; the Proprietor having a Desire all Gentlemen and Ladies may satisfy their Curiosities, in seeing those wonderful creatures, thought proper to acquaint the Publick, that it is imagined they will be Sold to go Abroad. None but Principals need Apply. (Anonymous 1752f)



Figure 1. George Edwards: “The female rhinoceros, drawn from the life in London A. D. 1752”. Published 14 September 1752 (John Johnson Collection: Animals on Show 2 (92), Bodleian Libraries, Oxford).

The noble female rhinoceros took to the road again and died shortly before 8 March 1754 when it was reported in Derby that

the famous Rhinoceros which was about four Years ago shewn at the White-Hart in this Town . . . was taken ill upon the Road from Mansfield to Nottingham, and died upon the Forest, near Red-Hill, on Thursday, to the great Loss of the Proprietor, Mr. Pinchbeck. Who purchased it of Mrs. Parsons some time since
(Anonymous 1754)

One wonders whether the transfer of ownership of Mr Pinchbeck's much travelled rhino took place when she was offered for sale in May 1752. Nothing more is known of Pinchbeck nor of Mrs Parsons – there is no reason to associate her with Dr James Parsons (see below), as Parsons is a common surname and showmen and women would have been considered very low class.

THE MALE RHINOCEROS

In June 1739 less than two years after the arrival of the female, a two-year old male rhinoceros arrived in London from Bengal, on board the *Lyell* East Indiaman, Captain John Acton. (Rookmaaker 1973: 46, 1998: 83; Clarke 1986: 42–46). After having visited Madras the *Lyell* left Calcutta on 31 July 1738 and arrived in the Downs nearly a year later on 2 June 1739.⁵ Within a fortnight the rhino was on show in Eagle Street near Red Lion Square in London, from 9 in the morning until 8 at night on payment of half-a-crown. This information was repeated in at least 27 identical advertisements in the *Daily advertiser*, *Daily post*, *London daily post and general advertiser* and *London evening post*, between 15 June and 10 November 1739 (Anonymous 1739a, 1739b).

The description of this rhinoceros in a 1739 pamphlet, *A natural history of four-footed animals. Of the rhinoceros* (Anonymous 1739c; Rookmaaker 1978: 27–30), stated that he was

judg'd to be about three Years old, having as yet no Horn, only an Excrescence in the Place where it is to come out; they say it was taken in *Patna*, and brought down to our *India* Company's Settlement in Bengal, where a Drawing in Indian Ink, was made of it by *Thomas Gregory-Warren*, Gunner of *Fort William*, 1738. which we have seen.⁵

More importantly, the anatomist Dr James Douglas F.R.S. described the male rhino at a meeting of the Royal Society on 24 June 1739 (Parsons 1743: 527) and showed several pictures of it drawn by his assistant Dr James Parsons.⁶ Parsons also painted an oil portrait of the rhino, first recognized by Rookmaaker, which is in the Natural History Museum, London (Thackray 1995).⁷ One of Parsons' drawings was engraved and published as a poster in October 1739⁸:

An Exact Figure of the RHINOCEROS that is now to be seen in LONDON. Inscribed to Humffreys COLE Esq. Chief of The Hon^{ble} East India Company's Factory at PATNA in the Empire of the Great MOGUL for the Favour he has done the Curious in Sending it over to England.

Having been made a Fellow in 1741 Parsons himself was able to present a detailed description of the male rhino to the Royal Society, which was published in 1743; he had spent many hours observing it first in Eagle Street and later at a booth at the London-Spaw (a pleasure ground in Clerkenwell). Parsons noted that the rhino was fed on rice, sugar and hay, besides “greens of different kinds” and that its keeper, who came with it from Bengal, “would make him thus emit his penis, when he pleased, while he lay on the ground,

by rubbing his back and sides with straw” (Parsons 1743; Clarke 1986: 41–46; Rookmaaker 1973: 46, 1998: 83).

The male was exhibited at the much reduced price of one shilling at the Golden Cross at Charing Cross in November and December 1739, and in November 1740 at the Bell in the Hay-Market, when he was promoted as “much more curious than the Female that has been lately advertize’d” (Anonymous 1739d, 1739e, 1739f, 1739g, 1740).

London may have had its fill of rhinoceroses. As we have seen, in March 1742 the female was in Derbyshire (Anonymous 1742a) and by March 1742, the “Great male Rhinoceros . . . shipp’d on board the Lyell,” was in Lincolnshire at the George and Angel Inn in Stamford; it travelled on to Lincoln and Gainsborough in April (Anonymous 1742b), and then disappears from the records.

THE SECOND FEMALE RHINOCEROS

The life of the famous female rhinoceros named Clara has been documented in detail by several scholars (Rookmaaker 1973: 46–57; 1998: 62–67; Clarke 1986: 47–68; Rookmaaker and Monson 2000; Faust 2003). She had been brought from India to Rotterdam as a three-year old in 1741 by Douwe Mout van der Meer, captain of a Dutch East Indiaman and travelled around Europe for the next 16 or so years; it seems that she was on show in London at the age of 18 in 1756 and may have ended her days there. She probably arrived in London by ship from Copenhagen. In a letter dated 12 June 1755 the Danish King Frederick informed the city magistrate that he had received an application from “Douve Mout” requesting permission to exhibit a rhinoceros outside the city walls; four days later permission was granted (Jørgensen 1986). It was reported in a letter from Copenhagen to an English newspaper on 14 June (Anonymous 1755) that, “A Dutch Ship is arrived here with a Rhinoceros, which is 13 Years old, and weighs 6000 lb. This Beast consumes daily 80lb. of Hay and 30 of Bread, besides a good Quantity of Wine and Spiritous Liquors. They keep it in a great Cage on Wheels.” But by the end of the year it was reported that the rhinoceros in Copenhagen was 14 years old (Anonymous 1756a). Neither of these ages ties in with Clara’s birth date of 1738.

Clara was displayed in a tent at the Horse and Groom in Lambeth Marsh (now south London), where, according to a newspaper cutting, having been seen by “The Royal Family, and Nobility and Gentry . . . with great Satisfaction”, she was on view from 8am till 6pm, at “2s the first Place, 1s. the second, and 6d. the third”. The cutting (in the John Johnson Collection), is from an unknown newspaper and bears the date 1756 in manuscript. The text of the cutting is an abbreviated version of that on a well-known broadside headed⁹:

TO BE SEEN,
at the HORSE AND GROOM in LAMBETH-MARSH,
The Surprising, Great and Noble ANIMAL Called
RINOCEROS
ALIVE.

The text on the broadside is a loose translation of the German text of an advertisement for Clara in that appeared in *Rostocker Zeitung* in 1754 (Faust 2003: 58) and the rather crude woodcut image of Clara appears to have been printed from the same woodblock as a

broadside with a Dutch text, dated to later than 1750, illustrated by Rookmaaker and Monson (2000: 323). The English broadside was tentatively dated by Clarke and others to 1756 because of Clara's stated age of eighteen; it probably post-dates the newspaper advertisement by a few months as the price of admission has been reduced to "one shilling the first place and sixpence the second".

It is worth pointing out that the wording of the publicity material for Clara's presence in London at this time is completely different from that relating to the display of the female rhinoceros in London in 1751–1752.

Clara may have been taken to Haarlem in 1757, although according to a note printed on an broadside published in German and French she died in London on 14 April 1758 at the age of 21 (Rookmaaker 1978: 31, 1998: 67; Clarke 1986: 64).¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Far from being shown as a stuffed specimen, as surmised by Clarke (1986: 46) and by Faust (2003: 40), the female rhinoceros that arrived in 1737 was alive and well and travelled around England and Scotland until her death in 1754. Both she and the male rhinoceros were shown in London in 1740–1741, and it was her, not Clara, who was seen by George Edwards in London in 1752. The date of 1756 written on the newspaper cutting relating to Clara's stay in London agrees with that previously assigned to the well-known broadside on the basis of her age.

The digitized newspapers from which much of the information contained in this paper has been culled are a source of a vast amount of information about the travels of these rhinoceroses (and other show animals) around Britain, nevertheless there are still many large gaps, which it will be possible to fill as more and more newspapers are digitized and become available on-line.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr L. C. Rookmaaker for a critical reading of the first draft of this paper and for alerting me to several sources of information of which I was unaware. Access to rhinoceros literature has been greatly facilitated by use of the invaluable "Rhino Resource Center" (Rhinosourcecenter.com). This paper would not have been possible without digital access to the British Newspaper Archive, the 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers from the British Library, the Newspaperarchive.com and the John Johnson Collection at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Thanks are also due to Mrs Julie Anne Lambert for helping me with access to the John Johnson Collection.

NOTES

¹ East India Office Records IOR/L/MAR/B/610A, /610H(1), /610H (2). "The Downs", an area of the North Sea off the east Kent coast.

² British Museum, SL.5261.44. Reproduced in the Rhino Resource Center Image Library (URL http://www.rhinosourcecenter.com/images/Edwards-drawing_i1336293733.php?type=search&keywords=1737&sort_order=desc&sort_key=score; accessed 10 May 2014). Also reproduced by Clarke (1986: 42, figure 21) and mentioned by Edwards (1758: 24).

³ "Now to be seen, in the George Inn at the Hay-market, at 1s. each person" (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Animals on Show 2 (82d)).

⁴ Two versions of the plate “Female rhinoceros, drawn from the life in London A. D. 1752” exist, one with the penis – Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: John Johnson Collection: Animals on Show 2 (92) and Rhino Resource Centre Image Library (URL http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Edwards-1758_i1182595212.php?type=tax_images&taxon=6&sort_order=asc&sort_key=year; accessed 10 May 2014); where incorrectly dated 1754). The version without the penis is in the British Museum (BM 1861.1012.2378). The plate in *Gleanings* is reproduced in the Rhino Resource Centre Image Library (URL: http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Edwards-1752_i1189164202.php?type=tax_images&taxon=6&sort_order=asc&sort_key=year; accessed 10 May 2014).

⁵ Carwitham’s plates are reproduced in the Rhino Resource Centre Image Library (URL: http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Carwitham-1739_i1182590358.php?type=loc_images&locality1=7&locality2=&locality3=&locality4=&sort_order=asc&sort_key=year; http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Carwitham-1739_i1178387895.php?type=loc_images&locality1=7&locality2=&locality3=&locality4=&sort_order=asc&sort_key=year; both accessed 10 May 2014).

⁶ These drawings must have been among those preserved in the Douglas Collection in Glasgow University Library (Hunterian Av.1.17), some of which have been reproduced by Clarke (1986: 4, 1–46) and which have been described in detail by Rookmaaker (1978).

⁷ Parsons’ painting is reproduced in the Rhino Resource Centre Image Library (URL http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Parsons-1739_i1181048233.php?type=loc_images&locality1=7&locality2=&locality3=&locality4=&sort_order=asc&sort_key=year; accessed 10 May 2014).

⁸ Reproduced by Clarke (1986: 44, figure 24), and with marvellous clarity by Faust (2003: 40–41).

⁹ Glasgow University Library; (Hunterian At.1.15 - Item: p. 31a), reproduced by Clarke (1986: 48, figure 27c) and in greater clarity by Faust (2003: 111).

¹⁰ Rhino Resource Center Image Library (URL http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/images/Johann-Christoph-Berndt-1707-98_i1219868130.php?type=tax_images&taxon=6&sort_order=asc&sort_key=year; accessed 10 May 2014).

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Note: all anonymous references to *Derby Mercury*, *Stamford chronicle* and *Caledonian Mercury* are from the British Newspaper Archive; the majority of the remainder are to newspapers published in London, digitized from the British Library 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers in which page numbers are not made available. A few additional references were found in the Newspaperarchive.com.

ANONYMOUS, 1739a [Advertisement] “There is just arriv’d from Bengal ...”. *Daily post*, 15 June 1739.

ANONYMOUS, 1739b [Advertisement] “There is just arriv’d from Bengal ...”. *Daily advertiser*, 10 November 1739.

ANONYMOUS, 1739c. *A natural history of four-footed animals. Of the rhinoceros*. London.

ANONYMOUS, 1739d “To the Curious among the Nobility and Gentry The Rhinoceros lately arriv’d from India, is now remov’d ...”. *London daily advertiser*, 10 November 1739.

ANONYMOUS, 1739e “To the CURIOUS the RHINOCEROS which came in the Lyell ...”. *London evening post*, 18–20 November 1739.

ANONYMOUS, 1739f “To the CURIOUS the RHINOCEROS which came in the Lyell ...”. *London evening post*, 20–22 November 1739.

ANONYMOUS, 1739g “This is to give notice that the Rhinoceros ...”. *Daily post*, 29 December 1739.

ANONYMOUS, 1740 [Advertisement] “To the Curious. The Rhinoceros which came in the Lyell being of the Male Kind ...”. *London evening post*, 18–20 November 1740.

ANONYMOUS, 1741 [Advertisement] “To be seen at the Unicorn in Oxford-Road, opposite Argyll-Street ...”. *Daily advertiser*, 5 December 1741.

ANONYMOUS, 1742a [Advertisement] “Rhinoceros: OR, THE REAL UNICORN ...”. *Derby Mercury*, 6 January 1742: 4.

ANONYMOUS, 1742b “We hear the great Male RHINOCEROS ...”. *Stamford Mercury*, 15 April 1742: 3.

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Received 27 April 2014. Accepted 27 May 2014.