

Throwback Thursday: Dogs and other animals

Thursday 14 May 2020

Welcome to Throwback Thursday: Dogs and other animals - sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Val Crosby looks at another topic today, one that is close to her heart: 'Today, the [Art UK's #Online Art Exchange](#) has chosen the theme of 'dogs' when looking at art which made me think about the paintings in our collection. We know that our pets are therapeutic, lowering blood pressure and stress levels, and lifting depression. This is proving particularly true at the moment, as many people are discovering the benefits of sharing their lives with a pet.

Pet dogs, cats, horses and birds have been popular subjects in art for years, usually as part of a family portrait. In fact, if anyone saw episode 2 of [Grayson Perry's Art Club on Channel 4](#) last week, we could see that painting animals is considered to be one of the earliest art forms that has never gone out of fashion.

In more recent centuries, by the middle of the 19th century, animals were increasingly featured as the main subject of paintings. [George Stubbs'](#) astounding picture of [Whistlejacket](#) - a small, powerful, spirited racehorse, looks innocuous in art books, but its impact is incredible when viewed in the National Gallery. The painting is life size. [Winterhalter](#) and [Landseer](#) included dogs in the paintings of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and their family.

When we are able to wander about the museum at Bruce Castle again, you will see that there are animals featured in paintings and in sculpture everywhere in the building from different centuries. In the large [17th century painting of Bruce Castle](#) we can see a whole menagerie of animals connected with the household at the manorhouse, including a massive dog standing guard near to the front gate.

One artist who features heavily in the collections at Bruce Castle Museum is Beatrice Offor, the subject of a new exhibition at Bruce Castle in this, the centenary year of her death. Her work was highlighted in our first '[Weekend Wonder](#)' [post on 21st March](#). Looking [at her work](#), she obviously loved dogs, as they appear in several of her paintings. Usually small, characterful wire-haired terrier types, it is likely that they were based on much-loved family pets.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The painting of *Jack* (above) is quite possibly Beatrice's own dog. Whether Jack was a dog from her family home when growing up or in her home in Bruce Grove at Tottenham, is not known. It is nonetheless a charming study of a terrier - alert, looking up in anticipation of a treat, a game or a walk. Beatrice has captured every aspect of a family pet, happy and comfortable with his surroundings.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Two dogs in the painting above is equally delightful. One dog is standing, ready to hear the next command, while the other is clearly content just to curl up and snooze. I wonder if they could be mother and son, with the bouncy younger dog wanting to go and play?



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Believe it or not there is a dog in this painting of [Love Potion](#) by Beatrice Offor. A very loyal and lugubrious-looking Bloodhound can just be seen in the shadows. He looks very relaxed, resting his head on her feet and the luxurious red throw.

Two other paintings by Beatrice show the value of dogs as beloved companions, easing the stresses and griefs of life and providing comfort to their human family. The [painting below](#) depicts a young woman reading in Braille from a large book balanced across her lap. A little dog lies at her feet, not asleep but watchful, possibly providing some security and comfort for her, protective of the approach of strangers.





From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

In [*Graveyard Scene*](#) an elderly man is seated on a low gravestone next to a large table-top tomb. Perhaps he has simply paused for a rest, but more likely he is mourning a loved one. The dog sits beside him, head in his lap, gazing up in

silent, trusting sympathy. It is clear that the artist understood the bond between pets and people and the solace they can give their owners.

As the attitude towards animals continued to change in the later 19th century, and people wanted different dog breeds, the 'Dog Show' was born. These became very popular, and several were staged at Alexandra Palace.

Amended Bill.

GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY.

KENNEL CLUB DOG SHOW
AT
ALEXANDRA PALACE

February 12th, 13th, 14th & 15th. 1889

From the 11th to the 16th February, both days inclusive, the **ALEXANDRA PALACE STATION** will be **OPEN FOR TRAFFIC**, and Passenger trains, which ordinarily run to and from **Muswell Hill** will, between 9.30 a.m. and 8.30 p.m. on these days, be run to and from the **Palace station**.

Tickets will be issued on these days to Wood Green (Alexandra Park) and to the Alexandra Palace station, but these tickets will not include admission to the Palace.

KING'S CROSS STATION,
February, 1889.

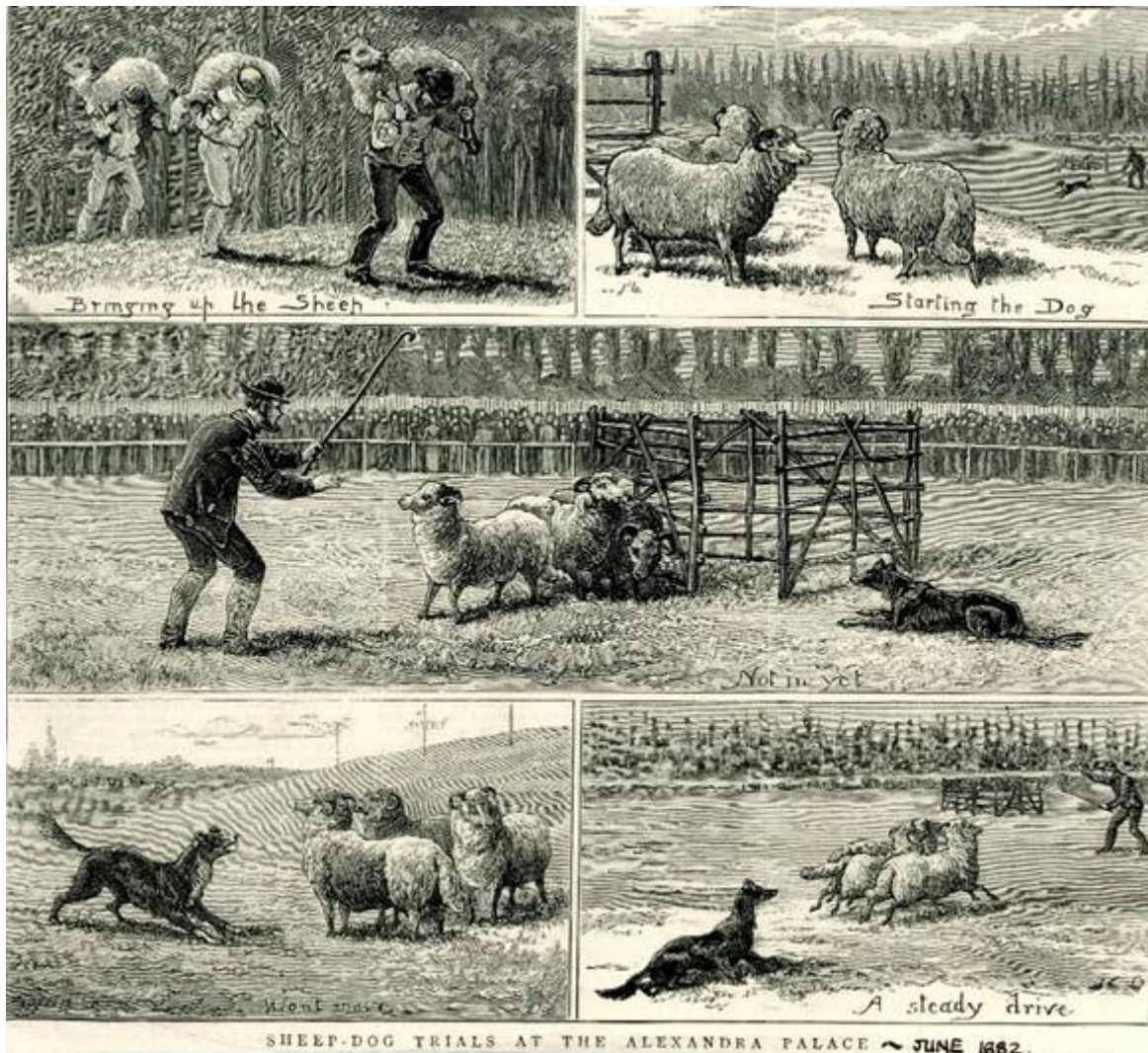
HENRY OAKLEY, *General Manager.*

Waterlow & Sons Limited, Printers, London Wall, London.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)
There was a hound show in July 1875 as seen in the first picture featured below
and regular dog shows, including this second picture (below) in 1878.



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)
 Sheepdog trials were also held there in 1882.



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

In the 20th century dog shows were very popular in several of Haringey's parks, particularly Lordship Recreation Ground in Tottenham. These often featured fun events such as agility tests and categories such as 'Waggiest tail' and 'Dog most like its owner.' There are a series of photographs shown below from the 1950s where trainers and their dogs put on a show for the onlookers. Half a century later on 26 May 2007, some of you might also recall a modern-day version of the 1950s dog show with '*Bling Your Dog*', held at Lordship Rec for [proud](#) and [responsible](#) dog owners.





From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)
During the Second World War such dedicated training of dogs combined with the intelligence of the dogs themselves was really put the test in extremely challenging situations as can be seen below. Here a dog has been trained to help search for survivors after a bombing raid on Gladstone Avenue in Wood Green.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Of course, it is not only dogs that feature in art, photographs and archives. Maybe surprisingly, we have more exotic pets too represented in our collections. Whatever thoughts we might have today about keeping such pets domestically, we know that monkeys have been kept as pets since medieval times – no doubt causing many difficulties for the people looking after them. Certainly by the Victorian period, monkeys were popular pets, despite some views at the time:

‘Monkeys are not very agreeable domestic pets, as they are extremely fond of mischief, and are very frequently vicious and spiteful to children.’

- so wrote Mrs Loudon in her 1851 pet-keeping manual *Domestic Pets their Habits and Management*.

Amongst Beatrice Offor’s artworks there is one of a monkey. The painting (seen below) is called [Monkey and A Jar](#) – maybe the monkey has just being caught helping itself?



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Another exotic pet mentioned in Mrs Couchman's *Reminiscences of Tottenham* (1909) was an emu, kept at Vale House, near Green Lanes. Local children were fascinated and visited the house to see it. Mrs Couchman believed the owner to be a Mr Sangiorgi, but census records from 1881 indicate that he lived at The

Hermitage nearby. Vale House was occupied at the time by a former veterinary surgeon named Edward Higg – who seems to be a more likely candidate for keeping an emu!

The last ‘exotic pet’ is more of an unexpected arrival in the Catling household in Tottenham. Here John Catling, a [Friend of Bruce Castle](#), recalls what his father brought home one day in the 1930s:

“ Then my Dad went to the Palace Theatre next door, as Assistant Stage Manager.... They had animal acts for the Variety shows at that time then and one of the acts had performing seals. Well, the bloke was taken ill or something, and he said to my Dad ‘You’ll have to look after them’. So they brought them home, put the seals in the in bungalow bath and poured water on them. They made a terrible mess. Never paid my Dad for it or anything!”

We hope you have enjoyed this look at dogs and a few other animals in our art and local collections. For those who are cat lovers, there is a promise of a future post of other animal tales for you – so do look out for that.

If you are a family with children, perhaps you would like to do our **Activity Sheets** attached, all themed about animals or dogs? You can do a wordsearch or colour in or have a go copying our character dogs! Have fun!

Until tomorrow, take care, stay well
Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

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