
A Dream Fulfilled

ON the afternoon of Monday, 29th March, 1934, Kent Zoo Park was opened. The ceremony was performed by Bertram Mills, the owner of a circus famous throughout the country, who was introduced to a large body of the great and the good, as well as many ordinary folk from the neighbourhood, by Alderman William Day, the Mayor of Maidstone. After the speeches, Garrard presented Mr. Mills with a bronze statuette of a lioness with two cubs, and the visitors were then taken on a conducted tour of the cages and enclosures. Almost all the preparatory work had been completed, and the guests, including a large press party, gained a good first impression of the new venture. After the tour, the great and the good went into the manor house to take tea with Garrard and his wife.

The Zoo's success was soon confirmed. The following Friday marked the start of the Easter holiday, which was then even more important to many people than it is now: it was the longest break that thousands had in the whole year. Over the four day period, more than 13,900 admission tickets were sold, and on Easter Monday no less than 300 cars were parked in the grounds, an extraordinary number in an age when car ownership was still the exception rather than the rule. The onslaught overwhelmed the Zoo's modest catering resources; but the visitors took the shortcomings in good part, and learning from experience, the facilities were quickly extended, so that such a situation should never occur again. It was from this surge of visitors that the first applications for membership of the Zoo Club were received. This was a body designed to provide for the interests of the more serious visitors to the Zoo, which Tyrwhitt-Drake had announced would be set up as soon as the Zoo opened. It continued to exist for several years, most of its meetings apparently taking place in a large shed which adjoined the lions' wagons.

When the Zoo opened, it possessed a large collection of lions, two Malayan tigers named Rajah and Ranee, a laughing hyena known as



Tyrwhitt-Drake with some of his Mouflon sheep. The tit-bit basket he often carried is very visible.

Squeaks, a large polar bear called Trousers, a sloth bear christened Pauline and an Arabian camel named Baby, as well as numbers of American, Russian and Timber wolves, baboons, and green and rhesus monkeys. In addition, there were large collections of birds and smaller animals, some of them in the Children's Corner, which was an instant success. To see all these attractions cost 7d. (3p) for adults and 3d. (1¼p), for children under 12 — at first even less for those who belonged to a children's organisation called the Keg Megs, run by the Kent Messenger newspaper, and were wearing its' badge when they bought their tickets. For them the prices were 5d. (2½p) for over twelves and 2d. for the under twelves.

Sadly, the promising start was marred after only a few weeks by a fatal accident. Frederick Cashford, a 16 year old assistant, had been clearing out the bear cage; as he finished, Tyrwhitt-Drake passed by and spoke to him. The lad had done his work passing a rake under the bars of the cage from the outside, for he was not authorised to enter the dangerous animals' enclosures. It was noticed that some debris remained uncleared inside the

cage, and the boy attempted to remove them with the rake. However, they were out of reach, and Tyrwhitt-Drake told him to leave them: he would speak to Mr. Thorneycroft, and ask him to move the bear to her sleeping quarters, so that the litter could be taken out in safety. Tyrwhitt-Drake walked away and encountered Thorneycroft about 40 yards from the cage. They were discussing the problem when they heard screams and ran back to the cage, seizing sticks and a shovel as they went. They found Cashford outside the cage, but with his right arm through the bars and the fingers of his right hand gripped in the bear's teeth.

Desperate attempts were made from outside the cage to force the bear to release its grip, but without success, and seeing that Cashford's plight grew rapidly worse, Tyrwhitt-Drake hurried away to get more help. He quickly returned, accompanied by a groom and armed with an iron bar. Entering the cage, the two men finally beat the bear off, but not before the lad's right arm had been badly mauled, as well as his left hand, with which he had frantically tried to prise open the animal's mouth.

The boy was carried into the manor house, an ambulance was called, and the nurse who attended Tyrwhitt-Drake's mother gave first aid. But the ambulance seemed to be slow in coming, and it was decided to rush Cashford in one of the family cars to West Kent General Hospital. He arrived there in little more than ten minutes. It was soon found that the injuries he had suffered were very serious and an emergency operation to amputate his right arm above the elbow was carried out. The operation was initially successful but septicaemia set in, and on the last Sunday in April Cashford had a sudden relapse, and in the afternoon he died of heart failure.

An inquest was held in Maidstone the next day. Tyrwhitt-Drake told the coroner that the bear, a black Himalayan, had never previously shown aggressive tendencies during the three or four years during which he had owned it. Mr. Cashford, he said, had been in his employment since the previous October; one of his regular duties was the cleaning of the bear cage. He was not a venturesome lad, and Garrard was certain that he would not have been teasing the bear. He had, however, a tidy disposition, and it might have been that he stood on tiptoe, holding the bars of the cage with one hand, while trying to manoeuvre the rake across the top; certainly the bear could not get its snout through the bars. The coroner said that no one would ever know exactly what had happened, and recorded a verdict of accidental death. The incident greatly upset Tyrwhitt-Drake, the more so because the publicity surrounding it attracted additional visitors to the

Zoo, drawn by morbid curiosity. The bear remained at the Zoo for many years, and was never again the source of any trouble.

Meanwhile, the other animals got on with their lives, peacefully indifferent to the lethal activities of the bear. A dingo (an Australian wild dog) gave birth to a litter of five puppies, and a baby lemur was born. Unfortunately, its father killed it before the staff knew of its arrival: lemurs very rarely breed in captivity, and no one had realised that the mother was pregnant.

At Whitsun a travelling fair, complete with swings, roundabouts, coconut-shies and side-shows, paid a visit, which further increased the tide of visitors, as did the completion of two new enclosures, the Goat Rock and the Sheep Rock. These featured a man made cliff-face, on which the mountain goats and sheep could leap from ledge to ledge as they would in the wild. Garrard had fine herds of goats and sheep, and large crowds would gather to admire their agility. In all, during the seven weeks from opening, no less than 28,000 people paid for admission to the Zoo, and 2,400 motorists used the car parks.



Goat Mountain and two of its inhabitants.

All through the summer the Zoo continued to prosper, until early in November Tyrwhitt-Drake closed it for the winter. Over 87,000 people had passed through the entrance gate since opening; his enterprise had paid off, and he decided to re-open in March and to use the intervening period to enlarge and further improve the facilities.

When the Zoo re-opened on 24th March, 1935, the area covered had grown to twelve acres, a reserve called Wolf Wood had been established, and near to this a small mammal house had been built containing twelve cages. The inhabitants included bonnet, mangabey, rhesus and other small monkeys, raccoons, which are about the size of cats and are common over much of North America, their near-relatives coatis, which are somewhat larger and have pig-like snouts, and agouties, a tail-less rodent about the size of a rabbit. The small mammal house operated on a one-way system: visitors entered at one end and emerged into Wolf Wood at the other.

The café had been extended and Mr. Beslee appointed Manager, and near to it a parrot house had been built. This was designed in the same way as the small mammal house, but with benches along each side of the interior, on which portable cages could be placed. Both buildings were heated by proprietary small slow burning coke stoves of the "Tortoise" brand, and were painted green, which had emerged as the Zoo's house colour and was generally used throughout from this time on.

The bears had also been provided with new quarters, large enclosures surrounded by thick metal bars embedded in a concrete floor, and in each a door at the rear leading to the animal's sleeping quarters. These backed onto the yard in which the bears had previously been located, which was now closed to the public. In all, at the start of the 1935 season, the Zoo contained no less than 130 enclosures and cages of varying kinds.

Among the most popular exhibits were Billy, a capybara or giant guinea pig, the largest species of rodent in the world, and Trousers the polar bear, who now had a pool in which to splash and laze. The Arabian camel also attracted many visitors; it had been moved from a shed to an open air enclosure with sleeping quarters at the rear. The camel liked the change, and so did the humans, for the fragrance in its old home had been memorable. Other favourites included some lion cubs which had been born in the Zoo the previous year.

Tyrwhitt-Drake's famous Royal Cream ponies were not technically part of the Zoo, but visitors had an excellent view of them as they walked along the drive from the main entrance, and also from inside the Zoo, for they roamed freely in the surrounding parkland. Garrard had built up a



May, Tyrwhitt-Drake's cream coloured mare, with some of the Royal Cream ponies.

large herd since purchasing his first stallion, named Prince, in 1913. He had been unable to find a cream mare to put to him, and so had tried a roan Shetland. This produced rather mixed results, so he experimented with Exmoor mares, some browns and one chestnut. Brown ponies were the outcome, but when in due course they were presented to Prince, pure cream ponies resulted every time.

They were lovely animals, well-mannered, intelligent and hardy, and were in great demand at Christmas time. For many years they could be seen pulling Cinderella's carriage — also supplied by Tyrwhitt-Drake, who had several in pantomimes of every grade, from the magnificent productions at the London Palladium down to modest shows at small local theatres. Prince and his offspring based their claim to the title "Royal" on the fact that two of his ancestors had been given to Queen Victoria by Lord George Sanger's Circus, which until 1911 was the line's only home, after she had admired them at a Royal Command performance. Subsequently she employed them to pull her bath-chair around the Royal gardens.

On Easter Monday, 1935, some 5,000 people visited the Zoo, with a corresponding demand for refreshments. This time, however, the catering department was prepared, and no cases of unsatisfied hunger or thirst were