

## A Potted History of Llamas in the UK (1)

### Part Two - 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The earliest evidence of llamas at zoos in the UK I have found are at: London Zoo (1829), Liverpool (1835), Belle Vue, Manchester (1855), Edinburgh (1929), Cobham (1931), Ampthill (1907), Chessington (1932), Whipsnade (1938), Dudley (1941), Wellingborough (1943), Battersea Children's Zoo (1957), Bristol (1963), Chester (1960s), Basildon (1980s), Blackpool (1960s), Paignton (1940s), Colchester (1966), Twycross (1970), Knaresborough (1972), Aberdeen (1976), Windsor Safari Park (1990) This does not necessarily mean they did not already exist before these dates or indeed at other zoos but a new arrival, via import or birth, usually attracted public interest. Zoos and visitor centres no doubt wanted to capitalise on this to draw in extra visitors so made sure local newspapers knew about them. The newspapers in turn knew that a picture of 'quirky adult animal' or ever so cute cria would in turn attract their reader's attention. Also looking to draw interest and commercial opportunities, some llama keepers explored more novel uses of the animal. *The Bystander* (7 August 1907) has a photograph of llamas being ridden and the *Daily Telegraph* 31 January 1916 of a llama being used to pull carts. Some pundits speculated about other uses for llamas and *Punch* (7 April, 1909) rather satirically depicts llamas being used in hunts. During a period of growth and expansion as zoos became very popular, exchanges of exotic animals between them regularly took place to increase their range although in times of austerity the reverse has been true. Chester Zoo once homed all four types of New World camelids but today does not have any as its collection has become much more focussed on specific and endangered species. .



Fig. 9 - Sailor Lads and the Llama (*Daily Telegraph* 3/1/1914)

I have not yet managed to discover much about the use of llamas in travelling circus although they were known to be a part of some post Second World War companies (eg. *The Picture Post* carries a photograph of llamas belonging to Chessington Circus in 1942) before declining in use alongside most other animals in circus settings amid popular protests. This may have been the reason for Mary

Chipperfield's circus auctioning off its llamas and other animals in 1980 (*The Guardian*, 20 November, 1980).



**Fig. 10 - Children riding Llama at Ampthill, Beds. *The Times*, 1 April 1912.**

Otherwise, it has been very difficult to find any mention of llamas in the public press, in this period, perhaps not surprising when priorities were probably focussed on other matters, especially with all the political unrest in Europe and two world wars.

Some further importation did take place and again it was into the North West of the country. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1930, 12 llamas arrived in Liverpool aboard a ship from Buenos Aeries. They were the property of Mr H. E. Roper of Mossley Hill, Liverpool who kept some for his own zoo and distributed the rest to zoos around the UK. (*The Scotsman* 25 May 5, 1930).

Possibly a red herring but alternatively revealing of an attitude or perception of llamas at the time was an article in *The Times* (September 16, 1933) of a gentleman found guilty of being drunk in charge of a llama in Brixton High Street using the animal to help promote a new film showing at the local cinema. It is difficult to tell whether it made the national press because of its novelty value or potential for a laugh, but I doubt that if it was a sheep he was parading for a film with a sheep in it would have received the same media attention. Still it remains an animal of curiosity, amusement, unpredictability as possibly suggested in the children's expressions and composition of the photograph below. [Are the young lady's thoughts-weird isn't it, the boy's – hurry up I don't want to be spat at?]



Fig. 12 – A school visit to Edinburgh Zoo. Evening Telegraph (Dundee), August 17, 1931, Issue 17074, p.6.

This is not to say that their attributes were not acknowledged and respected in some contexts, the surefootedness and security of llamas were used in advertising cars and insurance below.

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