
Liverpool's important past: Comedians, Football, Music and Llamas!

As a nearby resident and keen flag-bearer for Liverpool and Merseyside, what has been especially rewarding for me researching and writing about the history of llamas for a forthcoming book is that some of the most significant events have been within a stone's throw of my home. When I first started out on this journey, I had no idea.

It turns out that the first 'official' llamas into the UK, possibly Europe, came into the country via the Port of Liverpool sometime in the 1830s. They were to grace the grounds of Lord Derby's estate at what today is known as Knowsley Safari Park. Exotic animals at the time provided a fashionable way of showing off 'something different' or unique for the purposes of conspicuous consumption. Unfortunately, it was not all plain sailing and initial wisdom of the time had it that the high attrition rate amongst his llamas may be due to the fact that here they were living at relatively low altitude and that this may be detrimental to them in some way (in their native south America they often resided at 15,000 feet above sea level). As an experiment, they moved the llama from Knowsley for a spell to the nearest high land they could think of which was the 100 feet above sea level Bidston Hill on the Wirral. The problems however, were more pronounced than this and related more to the llamas' nutrition. It was a professor from the University of Liverpool (the first University Veterinary School in the UK), Alfred Higginson, who was the first to dissect a llama. This led to a better understanding of their anatomy and physiology which in turn, helped inform their dietary processes and needs. Discussion and debate between scientists and the farming community ensued in the *Liverpool Mercury*. Basically, llamas turned out to be modified ruminants.

By the mid-19th century, according to *The Morning Post* (26/12/1851) Lord Derby had 21 llamas and alpacas roaming his estate and was further described as being unrivalled in Europe.

A passion for natural history: the life and legacy of the 13th Earl of Derby (edited by Clemency Fisher, Liverpool: National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside, 2002), gives us the first clue as to what these animals looked like.



Figure 1 Lithograph of llamas at Knowsley Hall drawn from life December 1844 by B. Waterhouse Hawkins (Zoological Society of London - <https://www.zsl.org/blogs/artefact-of-the-month/baby-llama>)

A similar lithograph helps distinguish them from the pure alpaca type.

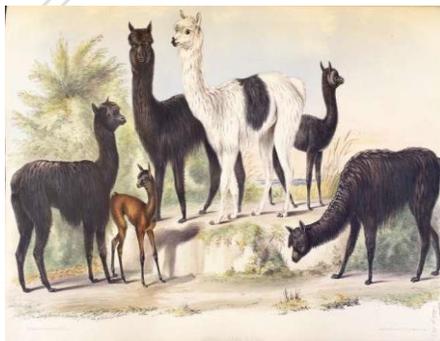


Figure 2 Lithograph of alpacas drawn from life July 23 1844 by B. Waterhouse Hawkins at Knowsley Hall, Plate LII (Zoological

Society of London - <https://www.zsl.org/blogs/artefact-of-the-month/baby-llama>),

On Lord Derby's death in 1851, some of these llamas were sold alongside other exotic animals from his menagerie at a sale and from here went to various countries on the Continent and other parts of the UK including the estate of Sir Titus Salt in Yorkshire who was to make his fortune from processing their (mainly alpaca) wool. According to the *Morning Post*, '1 llama sold for £28 to Mr Atkins, Liverpool; 1 llama (old), past its best days sold for £26 to Jamrach, a German from Hamburg; 1 llama, female sold for £33 to Herring of London for Sir W. Fielding, Fenniscaule, Lancashire, 1 llama female sold for £30 to Mr Atkins for out of the country; 1 llama female (fawn) sold for £28 to Mr Vekeman, Antwerp Zoological Society'. Mr. Fielding had a menagerie at his country estate in North Lancashire.

Mr Atkins, a Liverpool naturalist, owned Liverpool Zoo which was reputedly second only to London Zoo to have any llamas and this was only 3 years later in 1835, the "*List of the Animals in the Liverpool Zoological Gardens*" tells us. It also mentions that they were donated by a Mr Charles Tayleur who kept them at Parkfield, the Dingle, Liverpool (It is a wonder that the TV 'sit. com'. *Bread* never picked up on this!). Later that same year, a llama residing at the Liverpool Zoological Gardens was reported to be making its appearance in the town at the Christmas pantomime - *Blue Beard* (*Liverpool Mercury* November 27, 1835) which one might reasonably assume was the same animal.

25. *Pair of Lamas.*

Camelus llacma, Linn.

One presented by Charles Tayleur, Esq. Dingle Park.

The Lamas congregate together in considerable herds on the sides of the Andes, and generally in the colder and more elevated regions.—When the Spaniards first arrived in Peru, they were the only beast of burden employed by the natives; and even at the present day, when the horse has become so common, they are preferred for passing the mountains, on which their sureness of footing, exceeding that of the mule, gives them a manifest superiority. Generally speaking, they are quiet, docile, and timid; but they occasionally exhibit much spitefulness, especially if teased: their mode of evincing this is very peculiar, and consists in darting their saliva through their nostrils with considerable force.

Although the description above is inaccurate in some respects, it was Thomas Atkins, who had overseen llamas and alpacas at his Liverpool Zoological gardens, who wrote the first technical guidance notes on the welfare of these animals including during their transit. Increased interest in these animals also led to even greater diversity in objectives for them and selective breeding to meet different needs. Better informed naturalists also started to travel further afield and spread the word to shepherds in far flung parts of the world.

Interest in these animals by industrialists like Sir Titus Salt marked a significant development in the history of camelids in the UK since it was now recognised that they might have commercial possibilities. The great hope by now was that these hardy animals, along with alpacas, capable of surviving on bare scrub in the Andes, could populate the moorlands of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the Welsh and Scottish mountains, providing a ready, reliable, voluminous source of quality fibre for the burgeoning textile industry, especially now that techniques for processing more specialist fibres had been invented in Yorkshire. The idea was this would reduce the cost of importing raw fleece from South America and hence profitability. An article in *The Penny Magazine* (The llama and its silk wool, 30/11/1839) suggested the llama wool was not in competition with sheep's wool but silk. *The*

British Association for the Advancement of Science discussed the potential of llama wool for the British textile industry and the suitability of British habitats for rearing them at its 5th Annual Meeting in Birmingham in 1836.

The same year witnessed the first importation of llama wool I have found. This was a consignment to Liverpool. Clearly, it was not well received by the Liverpool dockers.

THE GREAT YORKSHIRE LLAMA.

SIXTEEN years ago—that is to say, in the year 1836—a huge pile of dirty-looking sacks, filled with some fibrous material which bore a strong resemblance to superannuated horse-hair, or frowy elongated wool, or anything else unpleasant and unattractive, were landed at Liverpool. When those queer-looking bales had first arrived, or by what vessel brought, or for what purpose intended, the very oldest warehouseman in the Liverpool Docks couldn't say. There had been once a rumour, a mere warehouseman's whisper, that the bales had been shipped from South America on spec, and consigned to the agency of C. W. and F. Fozzle and Co. But even this seemed to have been forgotten; and it was agreed on all hands that the three hundred and odd sacks of nondescript hair-wool were a perfect nuisance. The rats appeared to be the only parties who at all approved of the importation, and to them it was the very finest investment for capital that had been known in Liverpool since their first ancestors had migrated thither.

Well, those bales seemed likely to rot, or fall to dust, or be bitten up for the particular use of the female rats. Brokers wouldn't so much as look at them. Merchants could have nothing to say to them. Dealers couldn't make them out. Manufacturers shook their heads at the bare mention of them. While the agents C. W. and F. Fozzle and Co. felt quite savage at the sight of the Invoice and Bill of Lading, and once spoke to their head-clerk about shipping them out to South America again.

Figure 26 Llama wool, Yorkshire bound – Dickens, *C. Household Words* Nov 27, 1852; 6,

Otherwise, llamas went out of fashion in the second half of the 19th century. The next evidence of any imports I managed to discover were via *The Scotsman* (6/7/1929). It reported the arrival of 12 llamas from

the Argentine bound for Bristol and Edinburgh Zoos and mentions the arrival of 11 llamas on the 3rd of May, 1930 into Liverpool aboard the steamer ship *Bronte* from Buenos Aires. They were the property of Mr H. E. Roper of Mossley Hill, Liverpool who kept some for his own zoo (in Mossley Hill) and distributed the rest to zoos around the UK. (*The Scotsman* 20/5/1930).

Llamas and alpacas, however, did not come into their own until the end of the 20th century following a boom in popularity in North America, where they were used for trekking, driving carts, gold caddying, therapy and even hunting.

The first alpacas to enter commercial herds in the US and New Zealand were from Chester Zoo, exported through Liverpool.

Hillview Llamas which runs a trekking business and visitor centre in Frodsham recently imported some llamas from North America where the best are now to be found but these came on an aeroplane and via Europe.

Dr Richard Cox is a top breeder of llamas where he also runs a trekking business at *Hillview Llamas*, Frodsham and is author of 3 forthcoming books on llamas, the first *Llamas and Society* is a natural and social history with a contemporary analysis of current trends and uses.