1. Glasgow Zoo, Calderpark

2. Previous zoos in Glasgow

THE HISTORY OF GLASGOW ZOO, CALDERPARK

The Zoological Society of Glasgow was founded on 15th December, 1936. The Society's aim from the start was to found a zoological garden within the city boundaries. The initial proposal was to participate in the Empire Exhibition in Bellahouston Park in 1938 with a four-acre exhibit of Animals of the British Empire, and then expand into the rest of the park when the Empire Exhibition finished.

This proposal was rejected by the Exhibition organisers, so various other locations were considered. No site within the city could be identified. At the end of 1938 the Society looked at the Calderpark Estate, a couple of miles beyond the city boundary. The name of the Society was subsequently altered to the Zoological Society of Glasgow and West of Scotland, although more recent boundary changes have incorporated Calderpark back into the city.

The founder President of the Society was Edward Hindle, Professor of Zoology at Glasgow University. He subsequently moved to the Zoological Society of London. The founder Secretary was Sydney
Benson, who became the first Director of the zoo. Another early member of the Society, Edward H. Bostock, had promoted the idea of a zoo for Glasgow for forty years and his family connection with animals in Glasgow went back well over a century.

The onset of World War II delayed the opening of Calderpark Zoo until 9th July, 1947. Since its opening there have been three Directors only: Sydney Benson, Jerry Fisher and the present Director, Richard O'Grady.

For more information on the background of the current Glasgow Zoo Park click HERE.

**OTHER ZOOS AND WILD ANIMAL SHOWS OF GLASGOW**

Glasgow Zoo at Calderpark is only the most recent of a series of wild animal collections found in Glasgow over the past two centuries. They illustrate quite well the changes over time in views on animal captivity.

1. **WOMBWELL'S MENAGERIE, GLASGOW GREEN**
2. **GLASGOW ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, CRANSTONHILL**
3. **THE SCOTTISH ZOO AND VARIETY CIRCUS, NEW CITY ROAD, COWCADDENS**
4. **PICKARD'S NOAH'S ARK, PANOPTICON, 115 TRONGATE**
5. **THE GLASGOW CORPORATION ZOO, THAT NEVER WAS**
6. **WILSON'S ZOO, 68-76 OSWALD STREET**
7. **CRAIGEND CASTLE ZOO**
8. **BOTANIC GARDENS**
9. **OTHER ANIMAL COLLECTIONS**

1. **WOMBWELL'S MENAGERIE, GLASGOW GREEN**

George Wombwell founded a touring menagerie in 1805. This made regular visits to Glasgow for many years. Each year at the Glasgow Fair holiday (the last two weeks in July) the menagerie took up residence on Glasgow Green along with many other amusements. Contemporary accounts in newspapers welcome the menagerie enthusiastically, praising its educational and entertainment value, and describe the animal collection in detail.

In 1839, the menagerie, transported in fifteen waggons, included two elephants and a rhinoceros, zebras, onagers, llamas, six lions, panthers and leopards, ocelots, and three tigers. One hyaena is rearing a young one (an impressive piece of captive breeding) and a kangaroo is carrying a joey. The 'wild ass-zebra' mentioned may be the now-extinct quagga. In 1840, Wombwell is credited as having bred 160 lions over the preceding 25 years.

2. GLASGOW ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, CRANSTONHILL

The concept of zoological gardens stems from the founding of London Zoo in the late 1820s, keeping animals in parks being considered a humane improvement on keeping them in buildings or touring cages. Following on from the opening of London Zoo, a number of zoological gardens were founded around Britain.

In 1840 Glasgow hosted the tenth meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. There are a few references in contemporary records to the Glasgow Zoological Gardens at Cranstonhill. Cranstonhill was at that time the estate of a mansion house on the western edge of the city. The zoological gardens, located opposite the old Glasgow Royal Botanic Gardens, were founded by Thomas Atkins, also proprietor of the Liverpool Zoological Gardens. Atkins had previously owned a touring menagerie in competition with Wombwell.

Although there is reference to the 'rare birds and beasts, which must gratify not only the curious, but be the source of interest and instruction to the lovers of natural history', only four species have so far been identified. Three were donations: golden eagle, pig-tailed ape and Indian goat. The fourth species was the alpaca. It seems likely that the zoological gardens were founded to promote alpacas as a new Scottish domesticated animal to revive the textile industry.

Throughout the summer at dusk the gardens laid on great firework displays. Each show attracted as many as 4,000 paying visitors, with a further 40,000 watching the displays free outside the gardens.

For more information on the Glasgow Zoological Gardens, 1840 click HERE

http://www.buoi.ac.uk/org/cgws/zoo/gia.html
3. THE SCOTTISH ZOO AND VARIETY CIRCUS, NEW CITY ROAD, COWCADDENS

The Scottish Zoo opened near Sauchiehall Street on 12th May, 1897, inside a large building. It was the brainchild of Edward H. Bostock, a great-nephew of George Wombwell. E.H. Bostock had taken over the Wombwell touring menageries, adding his own name to the business in the process.

A charming, fictionalised description by John Joy Bell of a visit to the Scottish Zoo (written in Glaswegian) appeared in the Evening Times newspaper in 1902. This mentions performing lions and tigers, E.H. Bostock's famous stuffed elephant (now in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum), a polar bear, sloth bear, hyaenas, camels ('the wee yin's face is awfu' like Aunt Purdie'), parrots, monkeys, common seal, Californian sealion, and a tapir.

See also D392.5 for details of a marriage conducted in the lions cage of Bostock's Jungle in 1910.

4. PICKARD'S NOAH'S ARK, PANOPTICON, 115 TRONGATE

The Panopticon started life in 1857 as the Britannia Music Hall. Albert E. Pickard, an eccentric Yorkshireman and business rival of E.H. Bostock, bought it at the turn of the century. In 1908 he opened a menagerie in the basement called Pickard's Noah's Ark. Pickard's obituary in 1964 (he died in a house fire aged 90) says that he was proprietor of a wax-works, a macabre museum, several cinemas and a monkey-house. It is not clear whether the monkey-house is this basement menagerie or a separate animal show.

5. THE GLASGOW CORPORATION ZOO, THAT NEVER WAS

When the Scottish Zoo closed in 1909, E.H. Bostock offered the animal collection to the city as the basis for a municipal collection. The Corporation rejected the offer and the animal collection was dispersed.

Discussions about a Corporation zoo continued, however. In April, 1913,
a meeting of the Special Sub-Committee as to the Establishment of a Zoological Garden in one of the Public Parks considered a letter from E.H. Bostock welcoming the news that the Corporation proposed to open a zoo in Glasgow's Rouken Glen Park and offering a present of Indian cattle to start the animal collection. The committee sought advice from the zoos of London and Edinburgh.

The outbreak of the Great War meant that the Glasgow Corporation zoo was shelved.

6. WILSON'S ZOO, 68-76 OSWALD STREET

The Wilson family operated a commercial zoo in Glasgow for many years. On Wednesday 23rd December, 1936, a 'miniature zoo' opened inside a disused church near Glasgow's Central Station, renovated and modernised for its new purpose. This replaced an earlier zoo under the railway arches in Argyle Street. The Oswald Street establishment, owned by William Wilson and his son, housed a varied collection, including lions, a black panther, monkeys, a badger, parrots, macaws and a delightful mynah bird remembered for saying, "Where's the sawdust man?" in a broad Glaswegian accent. It was very popular and crowded, with two levels of cages and a pet shop in the basement. This zoo continued to operate until the 1950s. When it closed, the pet shop business moved just across the River Clyde to Carlton Place.

Wilson's Oswald Street Zoo opened only one week after the founding of the Zoological Society of Glasgow. It is possible these two events are linked in some way, although no documentary evidence has been found connecting them.

7. CRAIGEND CASTLE ZOO

The Wilsons staged a couple of animal collecting expeditions to Africa and needed to expand. From 15th April 1949 to September 1954 they ran an outdoor zoo at Craigend Castle, Mugdockbank, near Milngavie in the countryside north west of the city, but this proved difficult to get to by public transport. The collection included monkeys, crocodiles, an Indian elephant called "Big Charlie", lions and leopards, and many birds. The Chinese Pere David deer occasionally recorded in the wild near Loch Lomond stem from an escape from Craigend.
8. BOTANIC GARDENS

Another avenue to be researched is the collection apparently held in the Botanic Gardens as evidenced by the following:

The Glasgow Herald

Friday Morning, October 3, 1851

On Wednesday forenoon, as some young ladies belonging to this city were walking in that beautiful portion of the Botanical Gardens situated on the banks of the Kelvin, they were suddenly, to their great terror and surprise, assailed by the large baboon, which forms so great an object of attraction to the more youthful portion of the visitors at the Gardens. The fierce brute, which, with some other smaller monkeys, we believe, have been allowed to escape from their cage through the negligence of the keepers, seized one of the young ladies and bit her severely, and more serious consequences were only prevented by the appearance of some other persons, at whose approach the brute made off. We are induced to notice the above, as we understand the animals, which are still at large, and defying all attempts at capture by taking refuge, when such are made, on the tops of the neighbouring trees, are likely to prove a source of annoyance, and, as the above incident will show, even of injury to the frequenters of the Gardens.

Other Animal Collections

Several other animal exhibits have come to light, although details are fragmentary. There was a fenced-off deer park in Tollcross Park in the East End of Glasgow. This closed during the Great War of 1914-1918.

As we can see from this postcard, another public park in Glasgow; Elder Park, Govan, was home to Llamas early in the 20th century.

One of the occasional exhibitions in Glasgow toward the end of the eighteenth century had amongst its attractions a polar bear, a lion tiger, Punch and Judy, a learned horse, dwarfs, giants and a performing flea. The polar bear was not caged but attached to the floor by a chain long enough to permit it to climb into a water trough. The keeper used to
"dash a pailful of water in its face, which it took very kindly."

The lion tiger (also called a Royal tiger) was described as "a most fierce and savage animal" and was exhibited along with several monkeys and birds of rich plumage. One night it broke out of its cage and attacked a monkey, dying a few later as a result of swallowing the monkey's iron collar.

The locations of these temporary exhibitions have not been established, although there is an unconfirmed report of an eighteenth century "zoo" in the Merchants' City area of Glasgow.

A rhinoceros was certainly displayed in the Merchants' City, at 14 Virginia Street, for five weeks over Christmas, 1835, before travelling on to Edinburgh. At the time it was described as an Indian rhino, but it may have been Javan. This event is of particular interest because the rhino was owned by Thomas Atkins of Liverpool, who five years later was responsible for opening the earliest zoological gardens in Glasgow.

More recently, there is a fleeting mention of a small menagerie next to Niven's Hall and the Tea Gardens in Bridgeton, consisting of birds, beasts and reptiles.

Glasgow Mitchell Library holds a book "Glasgow Looking Glass", which includes a drawing of the "Glasgow Fair" as it appeared on July 28th 1825. Here we can see an excerpt which illustrates that there were a live lion, giraffe, snake and rhinoceros on view at the Fair in that year. Looking closely we can just see a second booth showing a lion on display, indicating a second exhibition at the same Fair.