

EXTRACTS from LOVE OF CIRCUS

David Jamieson, Sandy Davidson, Octopus Press, London, 1980.

It is said that the first Chipperfield recorded as a showman took a performing bear onto the ice for the Frost Fair when the Thames froze over in 1684.

The modern circus owes its origin to London in the late 18th cent when acrobats, tumblers and a clown were added to displays of trick riding. It moved to special buildings and then to tents. Wild animals came in the 19th cent. The flying trapeze started in 1859. America has a three ring circus = spectacle and numbers, Europe a single ring = intimate.

Ring-masters red tailed coat started by George Lockhart of Betram Mills in 1923, before that it was black or blue.

Sargeant Major Philip Astley, a former dragoon, roped off a ring at Halfpenny Hatch near present Waterloo Station. He trained his horses on a lunge, anti-clockwise so natural to have crowd in a circle. 6d a head. His "little military learned horse" could strike the day of the month and the hour of the day with his hoof, lay down as if dead, fire a pistol when ordered to fight for the dragoons. Soon Astley added tumbling, acrobatic pyramid building and Fortunelly the clown on the slack rope. Astley invited to France in 1782 to perform for the King. Hughes, once in Astley's company, went to Russia for Catherine the Great at St Petersburg and Bill Ricketts one of Hughes proteges built a circus in Philadelphia in 1793.

Diameter of ring stanradised at 13m (42ft). Cossack and Western trick riding uses a saddle. Buffalo Bill started in 1883, command performance for Queen Victoria in 1887.

One of Astley's successors was Andrew Ducrow in 1824. He invented "The Courier of St Petersburg", astride two horses, others pass between and he seizes the reins till five or more side by side in front of original pair. Horses in riding acts need to be extremely steady in gait and have broad backs. High School riding is an equivalent to dressage. The music keeps time with the horse not vice versa. The horses have to be very fit and it takes several years. The other form is the Liberty Horse in troupes of 4 to 12.

Billy Smart started a circus in 1946, died in 1966 and circus stopped in 1971.

Showmen with wild animals in 18th cent were zoological exhibitions. In 1820 the Frenchman Henri Martin and the Englishman Manchester Jack entered the cages. Atkins in 1825 at Bartholomew Fair had a lion and a tigress who jumped through a hoop, he put his head down the lion's throat, and then he would lay on the lion and the tigress would lay on him. He was at Astleys's in 1832. First tour with animals in a tent was in 1840's by Isaac van Amburgh. The big circular cage was introduced by Carl Hagenbeck in 1888.

First elephant at Astley's in 1827.

Con Colleano was the first to do a forward somersault feet to feet on a tight rope in 1923.

Flying Trapeze inventd by a Frenchman Leotard who also invented the one piece costume. His act was solo from trapeze to trapeze, eventually up to five. The team effort started with the Spanish Rizarelli brothers in 1870.

Guinness Book of records says Lena Jordon first to do triple somersault in 1897 in Sydney.

Astley's Ampitheatre of Arts visited by Queen Victoria and described by Dickens in The Old Curiosity Shop. It changed hands several times but finally Lord George Sanger had to sell it to LCC in 4 March 1893 after 22 years.