

Attacked by Forest-Bred Lions in Old Barn
MARTINI BARTLETT'S CIRCUS MEMORIES
(as related to L.Fairest)
The second article in our series
on the history of Lion Kings & Queens

The following article has been passed to me by Jim Stockley of Stockley Trained Animal Consultants¹ Jim's family virtually ran Chipperfield's Circus during the mid-twentieth century and I am eternally grateful for his wisdom and the wealth of information Jim has recently passed to me. Rather than forming the resource for another research paper I have published it here intact. It was written by Tommy Day² (aka Martini Bartlett) – and was first published by *World's Fair*³ as related to one L.Fairest. The footnotes are though my own and are made available subject to strict copyright. I have also corrected some minor spelling mistakes and grammar.

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2 Tommy Day, a member of the Day family that ran a travelling Menagerie in the late nineteenth century, was known as Martini Bartlett and travelled with the menagerie running Barlett's Lion Show.

3 L Fairest *World's Fair* probably published on 5th December 1936 although Bartlett has appeared in several editions of *World's Fair*.

Article

At various times information has been passed on to me that references have been made to my past history in the *World's Fair*. It would be an impossibility for me to give details in chronological order because, after 40 years training animals and travelling fairs from Land's End to John O'Groats, I have not one relic left, including programmes and bills, with which to connect the varied incidents of a career which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Lions, tigers, hyenas, bears and other animals I faced and I never ceased to marvel at the cunning with which they tried to usurp man's authority. I can honestly say that even if you have nurtured an animal from a suckling cub at some time or other its inherited wildness will break out and it will treat you like an enemy. Memories fit through my mind of the trainers who died because they had trusted their animals too much.

During this time when I was known on every fairground in the country as *Lion King* a black man (I forgot his name) was mauled to death at Hednesford, Staffs⁴. Bears limbed the famous Sargana and McCartney, the jovial one-armed Irishman, lost his life at Bolton⁵⁶. There are many other instances, and my own body is scarred from head to foot due to encounters with different animals.

Born in a Fair Ground

I was born into circus life at a fairground in Leicestershire and my family (the Days) had been wild beast trainers for generations. My brothers and sisters, as I did, grew up into the game, but for some reason or other I excelled.

One of my earliest recollections was to have lion cubs nestling on my bed for warmth. It was an old circus custom and helped to rear the newly-born. Before I was many years old my father took me into the cages with him⁷. What wonderful times we had.

Whenever their routes converged my father used to have the famous *Lord* George Sanger as a visitor. He was the *big shot* in Showland, but like many others who made a fortune out of it, he could neither read or write.

4 Shaun Everett, http://www.georgewombwell.com/articles/liontamer_montaro_01.pdf The accident, which occurred at Hednesford in the West Midlands of England, was on March 14th 1892

5 Jim Stockley's notes: There were two trainers named *Sargana* - the first was a black man named John Holloway Bright, aka *Big Jack* - he left Bostock's Menagerie in 1885 and was replaced by a *coloured trainer* Dellah Montana - who E.H. Bostock also billed as *Sargana*. This second *Sargana* (Montana) was mauled to death by a bear at Bostocks while at Hednesford. [See note 4]

6 Jim Stockley's notes: Thomas MacCarte (Thomas McCartney) lost his arm to a lioness in 1862 at Bell's Circus. He died at Boston Infirmary 6 Jan 1872, having been attacked by 5 lions in Manders Menagerie during the 10.30pm show on 3 January 1872.

7 *Daily News* (London, England) Tuesday, October 16, 1866; Issue 6380

At the Nottingham Borough Court on the Rev. J. B. Paton and the Rev. F. S. Williams, of the Congregational Institute, Waverley Street went before the magistrates on or before 16th October 1866, to complain of having seen a small boy being put in the lion's cage at a travelling menagerie whilst the *man in charge* remained outside. Rev. Williams also added that the entertainment included the child's riding on the lions' backs, and finished by his allowing the beasts to lick or kiss his face.

When asked the age of the boy the Rev. Paton replied about 3 or 4 years old. The menagerie was Day's appearing at Beastmarket Hill. It was stated that a sign advertising the boy's *act* was on display at the front of the menagerie. The magistrates called for the owner to appear before them to explain this deed. Since Mr Day was not available in Nottingham, Mrs Day and Mr. John Hopwood, the manager, and the child in question were called to the court. The magistrates agreed that such an act in the exhibition should be prohibited. Mrs. Day said the boy's father (Day the proprietor) always accompanied him, but several persons contradicted the statement, averring that sometimes he left the show. The magistrates could only recommend the entertainment to discontinue and if it did not, the menagerie would not be allowed to visit Nottingham in future. It was also reported that Leicester made the same stipulations.

One also recalls the old-time families such as the Fossetts, Ginnetts, Rosaires, Holloways and others, many still in Showland⁸. As *Lord George* smilingly told my father

Circus life is not a profession, but a disease!

It gets into your very marrows. Times have changed, and big circuses have their own trains to carry their baggage, but there was a glamour about the old circuses, with the smell of naphtha lamps, which swung in the winds, the moving from one town to another in a colourful cavalcade, which will never again be transcended.

My Own Show

Before I was 18 I owned my own wild beast show and, as people flocked to see foreign trainers more than English ones, of which there were not many, I assumed the name of Martini Bartlett. As soon as I could I grew a French Imperial beard and let my locks grow down to my shoulders. From morn until night on the fairgrounds I gave performances, often until midnight. but all the money I made was my own. Often after a good day I had cleared from £40 to £70.

Later, when I set out in a big way, and employed ringmasters, grooms, various acts and other incidents to make up a circus that was reputed to be next to Bostock and Wombwell's on size, I found what a fool I had been. Forage for horses, extra accommodation and wage bills cost me several hundred pounds per week. If I had known on Fridays when I had paid everything, to not have a penny left. I had to trust to the next place we visited bringing me in some money for my own use.

However, I did so well eventually that I was worth several thousand pounds. A circus means work day and night. Nowadays routes are planned months beforehand, but we had methods not quite so precise and often minds made up on a Sunday afternoon when the next *gaff* was going to be. In addition to being the *boss* I had over 30 lions, several tigers, three leopards, six hyenas, four bears, six wolves, alligators, reptiles, birds and other livestock to look after. Also there was a question of training the animals continuously, especially new arrivals. In addition to my own hand there were the horse keepers, stud grooms, a score of labourers, etc.

Training Animals

How is it done? scores of people have asked me in regard to training animals. You must be absolutely fearless for a start, as, in some particular way, animals seem to know if you are even momentarily nervy. Unflinching patience is a virtue, and it pays to have an ice-cold temperament when in the ring. Trainers have rued letting tempers get the best of them.

Also, I repudiate that any cruelty enters into training. A fear-stricken animal would not perform and it is only by engendering confidence that you can achieve anything. I have sat outside the cage of an awkward animal for weeks on end until it had got used to me. Mine, also was the hand that fed it. Then as a *try-out*, after many rather terrifying experiences, I would put a dummy of a man into the cage to see how the animal reacted to it. I have many a smile too, to see him *felled* with a mighty blow within a few seconds. *Not time yet, melad.* I have thought.

⁸ Fossett's Circus started around 1888 and is Ireland's National Circus. Robert Fossett was well-known as the *champion circus jockey*. Jean Pier Ginnett, a former prisoner of war from the Napoleonic wars started in England during the 1800s. There is an unproven claim that Ginnett raised the first 'big top'. Circus Rosaire dated from 1917 and ran until 1955. It was one of Britain's best medium-sized travelling shows, continuing to entertain the public even in the dark days of the Second World War. Holloway's is a very old circus starting in the first half of the nineteenth century and travelled mainly in the northern parts of Britain.

Two of my most famous lions, perhaps, were Joey and Wallace, the latter known as untameable. With them I have travelled to all the fairgrounds from Land's End to John O'Groats. To digress I like the Lancashire, Yorkshire, Herefordshire and Staffordshire crowds the best. They liked thrills, and would unloosen their pockets at the fairs.

Attacked by lion

Wallace was really a brute and at Sheffield one night made a dash for me and knocked me off my feet. Although it all happened in a flash, the men saw my plight and pushed red-hot bars and rods into the cage to get him to leave me⁹. I did not realise it until after I had crawled out in what a bad way I was in. He had left his marks on my body and bitten me badly on the shoulders and ribs. They told me that the people, excepting for the woman who had fainted, had rushed madly from the tent, and everything was in turmoil.

That happened before Easter, and it was Whitsuntide, at Bolton, before I started training again. However, as it was a very important fair, I wanted to resuscitate my somewhat depleted fortunes, and I took to the training act again.

The other lions appeared to be all right, but I could still see that Wallace was restive. It is an axiom among trainers that to be away from animals for any length of time is fatal. The influences you have gained over a long periods is thus temporarily broken, and it is like going in among *strangers*. He made one or two lunges at me when I tried to get him to *do his stuff* and, as I dodged, I could hear his jaw click as they met empty. I was too busy to feel afraid, but went out of the cage, nevertheless, with feelings of relief. I was too weak to want anything strenuous.

Treacherous Wolves

There is one point about lions. They are really the *Kings of Beasts* and come for you in a direct way. Tigers, cheetahs, pumas and others of the cat family stalk round you in circles to try to get you unawares. A bear will go for your legs to sweep you off your feet. Wolves will try and get you by the throat and, in connection I had a thrilling time at Barnsley at a fair called Churchfield. I shall never forget it, as it was during a big miners' celebration and the show was packed.

I had not had wolves very long, But found that like dogs they could be taught many diverting tricks. They had come especially from Russia, and a big *jack wolf* suddenly sprang on me unawares and tried to knock me down. With a wolf the paws, being like those of a dogs, cannot do much harm, but the jaws, which snap like lightning, can soon rend chunks out of you. These animals are known to go in packs, and so it proved.

Howling like blazes they all started on me and to frighten them I fired my revolver, which contained blank cartridges. Back they went and, in the meantime, I could hear the yells of the miners saying *Help him*, and so on. Pandemonium reigned. Planting my feet firmly and still firing my revolver, I gradually edged towards the cage door and got through just as the *big jack* led his pack in another concerted attack. It was another escape¹⁰.

9 *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (London, England) Sunday, December 26, 1897; Issue 2875. This practice was confirmed in a newspaper article, but the menagerie was in Newport, Wales not Sheffield at the time and it was winter. At this point Martini had also been billed as *Buckskin Bill*. '*...pinning him against the bars, began to claw his leg. The assistant tamer fortunately was at hand, and beat off the savage beast with red-hot bars of iron...*' stated the report.

10 *Birmingham Daily Post* (Birmingham, England) Monday, May 29, 1893; Issue 10901. This was also recorded in a local newspaper as happening in Sheffield. '*...At Sheffield, on Friday afternoon, a youth, a pupil of Bartlett the lion-tamer at Day's menagerie on the fairground, met with an accident. He was engaged in sweeping out the cage in which were three wolves, when one of them attacked him. Bartlett, who was in the lion's cage, rushed to his assistance, and succeeded in rescuing the youth, but not before he had been somewhat severely bitten on the arms...*' Whether the two incidents are separate or different versions of the same incident is not known.

Three Months in Hospital

One of the biggest events in my career, however, took place at Bolton. Taylor's Circus which, unfortunately, had run through a *purple patch* was to have the broker's men in and word came to me that I could have three lions very cheap¹¹. Actually, it was a *smuggling* act, and done to evade the authorities, and I finally arranged that the lions should be delivered at a barn in Bolton, where I would meet them¹².

I shall never forget seeing the lions in a big cage in that musty old barn. There were haystacks at each side and also ploughs and other farm implements. A big *Negro* had come with them and he warned me that they were real *forest bred*. However, as I was dead keen to be able to announce, with customary circus *ballyhoo*:

Important Announcement-Three Forest-Bread Lions Just Arrived,

I determined to see of what stuff they are made.

They proved to be demons. The lioness, with a look of hatred in her tawny eyes, made one or two attempts to get me and finally, while my attention was diverted by the other two, made a lightning leap up the cage and dropped on me with full force. Then *Prince* also set on to me, and soon I was in the midst of one of the biggest scrambles I ever had. Snarling and roaring, they would not leave me and before I could be extracted from the cage I was ripped from top to bottom.

I was taken to Bolton Infirmary, where doctors patched me up as best they could. I stayed in for a time and it was only after three months that I began to feel like my old self again. Such is the fascination of the life that I never thought of anything else, but wanting to get back.

There are many worse things even than that, however. A fire is a terrible thing in a circus, and although only one big experience comes to mind, it is enough. We were on the Market Place at Birkenhead when a fire started due to someone dropping a cigarette. It has to be seen to be believed how quickly the animals and birds sense that something is wrong. Almost simultaneously they all started making noises in a way in which nature intended and it was a terrible job to quieten them. What with people rushing about and getting in my men's way.

It was a horrifying situation. Happily the Fire Brigade was not long coming, but, what with the water and the flames, the damage was considerable enough.

Foolish People

It is also surprising how foolish people can be when feeding animals. Naturally, we had a big rope a good distance from the cages, but often people complained of being bitten. At Preston a man put his hand into a lion's cage and had it practically wrenched off, and a Wigan man, who was drunk, pushed his arm into a bear's cage. The animal got it in his powerful jaws and would not let go. We had considerable difficulty in extricating the foolish fellow, who, by the time we managed it, was unconscious. Animals may look docile enough in their cages, but it is never safe for a stranger to try liberties.

Elephants are curious creatures, but mighty useful to have. Where the horses fail to pull anything, you have only need to get an elephant to use its tremendous strength, and hey presto, the job is done. Poor old Ted Buff, the elephant man. He was crushed almost to death in a big stable, and it took months to heal his broken ribs.

¹¹ Taylor's Circus is thought to be a United States affair on tour in Britain during the late nineteenth century.

¹² It is thought that *Smuggling* acts involved the transfer of animals imported as part of a travelling menagerie or circus to a locally based proprietor. My assumption is that a few animal acts were brought over here with the idea of selling the animal stock. The nineteenth century brought stringent legislation concerning animal health after serious outbreaks of disease in cattle, etc. and it is possible this *route* was identified as a means to by-pass the authorities.

Fights between circus animals often have terrible consequences. During the nights they try to get each other, and when an animal has claws, it is surprising how they can get through almost anything. Lions and bears are sworn foes, but it would be difficult to say which would invariably come off best. The hug of a bear is a mighty one, and his claws equally as damaging as those of a lion. Naturally men in circuses keep alert all night for such untoward occurrences, especially if a gale should spring up. It is then customary to slit all ropes and let the canvasses flop, as otherwise they would stand the chance of being lifted bodily into another place.

Escaped lion

It was comical at Featherstone once, between four and five in the afternoon, when at a fairground near the station, a lion got out. It was not long before the fairground was absolutely empty for the man who had to catch it. The best method we found was to give each helper a board, not only as a protection, but so that a circle could finally be made around the animal to guide it back to its proper quarters. Yes, there's much to be thought about and many contingencies to be overcome. Perhaps that is where the fascination comes in.

Many of the past era will remember the excitement when a lion got lost in the sewers at Birmingham, and there was a veritable man hunt for it¹³. It belonged to Wombwell and Bailey's Circus, but as my own show was appearing on the same fairground, I assisted in the search¹⁴. *Orenzo*, a big African Negro, well over six feet in height was the trainer and I knew him very well. He was a fine fellow and a splendid specimen of manhood. I have met him in private life since and we chatted reminiscently over the incident which had the big town terror stricken at the time and people dare not leave their doors. Except for a few groups of men at street corners, the whole place looked almost deserted. At the back of the fairground was a small brook which finally flowed into a tunnel running underneath the town. By some means or other the lion got into the tunnel and finally into the sewers. It was an exciting search for it and after many anxious hours, hungry and probably feeling sorry for itself, it was captured.

A very similar incident occurred with Biddle's French menagerie, when it appeared at Halifax¹⁵. It was about three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, usually a very busy one in fairgrounds, when an animal got loose. You should have seen the crowds disperse and over two hours had elapsed before another soul came in after, which time it had been recaptured.

Working Mixed Groups

Working such animals as lions, bears in a team is dangerous work because the animals have an antipathy towards each other. I tried it on many occasions, but generally a circus cage is too small to permit such spectacular feats. I have done it for society people who wanted a thrill at private performances. I used to like such *commissions*. I know that many famous people were among the private parties who came to watch performances. A fee of £10 was the usual one for twenty minutes' performance, but this amount, plus the gifts, was acceptable. Royalty too, patronized my show, but word was usually left with my *agent* that was not to get publicity out of it due to the famous sightseers preferring to remain incognito. On one occasion King George, then the prince of Wales, dropped in at Worksop to see a show. He was shooting, one of his favourite pastimes, on a nearby

¹³ *Birmingham Daily Post* (Birmingham, England), Saturday, September 28, 1889; Issue 9754 places this event on or before September 28th 1889.

¹⁴ E. H. Bostock, *Menageries, Circuses, Theatres* (Chapman and Hall, London 1927) p131 Bostock relates that his brother, Frank C. Bostock had printed up much promotional literature under the name Wombwell, Bostock and Bailey. Apparently Frank was attempting to impress the public in the same way that Barnham and Bailey's had done in America. There was no known link between the two shows. E. H. Bostock also adopted the name for many of his shows. Frank eventually settled in the USA.

¹⁵ Biddle's French Menagerie was eventually renamed *Noah's Ark*. After touring fairs in England and Scotland, Francis Ferari the owner, partnered with Frank C. Bostock and arrived in America in the spring of 1894

estate-the Duke of Portland's I believe.

Effect of War

The outbreak of war saw a decline in circuses and, I am sorry to say, my own suffered badly. At that time I was making a pile of money, but the starting of the rot took place when I had about 40 of my beautiful horses commandeered by the Government for war purposes. They were very valuable to a circus and made a big gap in attractions I could offer. Naturally, I had a ringmaster to look after them, as I always preferred the excitement of those animals not so akin to those of man. However, I could not help repressing a sigh when such valuable animals trooped out of my circus.

After that things seemed to go wrong and gradually, but inevitably, the stock kept being depleted to pay the more urgent debts. Stock which I had bred myself, an economical feature in Showland, was sold at *mere song* prices. When I state you could pay £100 for a decent lion, about £200 for a perfect tiger, up to £250 for a small one, you will realise perhaps, the value of the big circuses.

Many showman in a desire to meet the public's insatiable demands for a change, often bartered with each other for different livestock. Many animals, of course, do not breed in captivity, but lions and tigers are fairly prolific. Even so, strange animals are not put in with each other, but what are known in Showland as *snifting bars* are put in between the cages so that they can get to each other. A big lioness once killed a fine young lion because she resented his intrusion too prematurely in her cage. It is a tricky business.

I find I have made little reference to bears, but I found them good animals to train. After a while they became quite affectionate, but their claws can leave some nasty marks. On my left hand are still marks from being slashed by a favourite. It was taking a piece of sugar out my mouth with his snout when it over balanced. To save myself I pushed it off, and it clung to my hand with its claw.

The Fluence Lion

Joey the *Fluence Lion*, as he came to be known is now stuffed and in Western Park Museum, Sheffield. He was what I called *a Christian* and I could do anything with him. I used to push my head between his gaping jaws and I shall never forget the *front page news* it made first time I did it. Sections of the public wrote in stating that it ought to be stopped – a man *needlessly risking his life to provide sensations*. But Joey never let me down.

It took years to train him to such a pitch of perfection. Day after day at a regular time I would prize his jaw open with my hands. At first he used to resent it, but gradually opened his jaw further and further. Eventually I got him to keep his mouth open as long as there was anything in it. It was not without a qualm that I tried pushing my head in for the first time, but I got used to it. It was a big blow when he died.

Sultan was the biggest tartar I handled and finally I had to stop training him. As an alternative from ordinary methods I tried a suit of armour when going into his cage. On the very first day he bit through the arm part and such was the strength of his jaw that the dents caused the steel to tighten on my arm to such an extent that I could not get it off. It had to be filed off at the finish. But that decided me that to train *Sultan* was taken unnecessary risks and he was considered to be stud for breeding. Fortunately his savage temper did not come out in progeny.

Perhaps now, when in the bright lights of circus and watching the performances, you will realise the tremendous work involved in presenting such a kaleidoscope of attractions and the constant mounting expenses *behind the scenes*. But under the *Big Top* is the greatest life in the world. End.