

Animals Everywhere!

By Vronni Ward

As the RSPCA celebrates its 200th Anniversary, Dover Museum is staging a fascinating exhibition looking at our obsession, with, and love of animals. We also consider the importance they have in so many aspects of our lives historically and today. Animals are an integral part of our lives and are indeed our 'best friends' - as pets, working animals, mascots, astronauts and companions/guides for people with disabilities.

Historically, animals were invaluable during the war years. One such example is "Mick", an Irish terrier, who in 1914 belonged to Charles Ripster an officer in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers stationed at Dover. Mick was a 5-year-old Irish terrier who lived with Charles and his family, but he was also a regimental pet to the men in the 2nd battalion. When WW1 broke out Charles was posted to the front in France and left Mick with his wife and children in Dover.

Mick was happy with that for a while but soon pined for his master and friends. He somehow managed to smuggle himself onto a boat that was taking troops to the front. He arrived in France and spent a long time searching for them. One day saw his master walking with some of his company and they were reunited but not for long. Gunfire and shells exploding frightened Mick, and he ran away. He was hit

in the shoulder with shrapnel and taken to St. Nazaire Hospital and nursed back to health. As soon as he recovered, he got out of the hospital and found his way back to his master in the trenches at Armentieres.

A few days later the order was given to attack and so they rushed out of the trenches with Mick leading the attack as he had done many times before on manoeuvres. He was hit by a bullet in the leg and returned to the hospital for three weeks with his leg in splints. He was sent back to the battlefield and spent six months in total with the troops. The theatre of war was obviously too dangerous for Mick, so he was sent home with one of the men from the regiment and arrived in Folkestone where he was kept in quarantine for four months.

He then resided with Charles' sister Beatrice in London. Whilst in London he collected for the Red Cross in New Bond Street for "Our Day" 1915. He managed to collect £6 14s 5^d which is worth about £700 today. An article about him appeared in the magazine, "Animals' Friend" in February 1916.

Our exhibition here at the museum includes: the recreation of a Victorian explorer's study with taxidermy dioramas and a gharial (a fish-eating crocodile); a mock-up of a room filled with animal related objects; paintings; and the depiction of animals in everyday objects such as games, sewing kits and crockery. There is an Animal Safari trail for children to complete and we have tokens for children to put in our vintage RSPCA donation dog.

The exhibition runs until May 2025. We open: Monday to Saturday 9.30am to 5.00pm. Open Sundays in the summer (April to September) 10am to 3pm. Free admission.

Tel: 01304 201066

Visit www.dover.gov.uk/museum



Mick - The Irish Setter