

INTRODUCTION

Georgian London spearheaded Britain's Enlightenment ambitions to tame and turn a profit from Mother Nature. It was from the Port of London that ships traversed the globe to acquire plants, timber, animal skins and live exotic beasts; and it was from the metropolis that Britain schemed to transplant livestock and crops from one continent to another to serve the imperial economy. In the 1780s, George III extracted merino sheep from Spain and nurtured this precious flock in the gardens of Kew and Windsor to produce breeding stock for the improvement of English wool. In 1804, the progeny of these animals were dispatched to the British colony of New South Wales and the seeds of a major industry were sown. Meanwhile, botanists, merchants and government ministers began to consider the possibility of cultivating Chinese tea plants in the mountains of Assam and Bhutan.¹ Along every trade route, Britain tightened its grip on nature but nowhere was this more striking than in the metropolis itself. In 1830, William Cobbett described London as the 'all-devouring WEN', a monstrous force stripping the countryside of people, livestock and grain.² Cobbett associated London's consumption of animal lives with rural poverty, but it was also an awe-inspiring demonstration of Britain's growing power and prosperity.

This book reveals a city of beasts which has been hiding in plain sight. A basic but often overlooked feature of William Hogarth's *Second Stage of Cruelty*, 1751 (see Figure 2), one of the most iconic images of Georgian London, is that animals are as prevalent as people. Hogarth, who was

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born in the shadow of Smithfield Market in 1697, depicts sheep, horses, a bullock and a jack-ass swarming into a Holborn cul-de-sac. As numerous scholars have observed, the artist uses the ensuing melee to expose the laziness, greed and cruelty of his fellow Londoners, but the city's relationship with animals was far more complex than this might suggest, and never stood still.³ By the time William Wordsworth visited in 1788, the intensity of horse traffic was far greater than anything Hogarth had known and by the early 1800s, it was estimated that 31,000 horses were at work in and around the metropolis. At the same time, around 30,000 sheep and cattle were driven through the streets to Smithfield Market every week. No other settlement in Europe or North America, in any earlier period, had accommodated so many large four-legged animals, or felt their influence so profoundly. And no other city in the world can provide more compelling evidence for John Berger's assertion that before the twentieth century, animals were 'with man at the centre of his world'.⁴

This book is about London but it also seeks to challenge a lingering tendency to view all cities, past, present and future, as being somehow divorced from the influence of animals, an assumption that threatens to exaggerate their artificial characteristics and downplay their complex relationship with the natural world. Since the early 1990s, scholars of North America, in particular, have led the charge for urban environmental history and opened up new avenues of research to consider the role played by animals in social and urban history.⁵ As we continue down a path of accelerating urbanisation and eco-crisis, there has never been a more important time to consider what cities have been, what they are today and what they could be in the future. Historians and social scientists have long disagreed about what cities represent and where their boundaries lie.⁶ Since the 1980s, there has been a growing emphasis on 'unbounding' cities in various ways to conceptualise them as 'spatially open and connected'.⁷ Bruce Braun observes that 'urbanization occurs in and through a vast network of relationships, and within complex flows of energy and matter, as well as capital, commodities, people and ideas, that link urban natures with distant sites and distant ecologies'; while Samuel Hays calls for a consideration of 'the direct interface between the city and

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2 William Hogarth, *Second Stage of Cruelty* (etching and engraving, 1751).

the countryside'.⁸ Thinking about urban animals sheds new light on this debate: as we will see, Georgian London's interactions with and impact on animals extended far beyond the geographical area upon which this book focuses, that is the more than 40 km² surveyed by John Rocque in the late 1730s and early 1740s. This comprises the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, and suburban zones including Chelsea, Bermondsey, Deptford, Stepney, Shoreditch and Clerkenwell

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(see Figure 1). Before we set off, it is important to keep in mind that in the early 1800s, less than two-thirds of this area was built-up and that market gardens, orchards, fields and meadows continued to occupy at least 4,000 acres of what was recognised to be part of the metropolis. We will occasionally venture further afield, but only to examine interactions between people and animals when they were travelling to or spending a few hours away from London. Nevertheless, this book seeks to blur the traditional boundaries of ‘town’ versus ‘country’, and ‘urban’ versus ‘rural’ because, as Roy Porter asserted:

Man has made the country no less than he has made the town, and from this it follows that the historical relations between town and country are contingent, expressions in part of changing images of the urban and the pastoral... The comparative history of urbanism is an enticing field, or rather piazza, ripe for further study.⁹

One of the many challenges facing urban environmental histories and urban nature studies is deciding whether it is appropriate to conceive of a city as a unified or consistent whole.¹⁰ Historians have often commented on the diverse functions that London performed in the Georgian period, including its role as the heart of government, justice and the royal court; as well as being a hub of banking, trade, consumption, sociability, art and publishing.¹¹ But there has been a tendency to carve London into four contrasting parts: the West End, the City, the East End and Southwark. This is now changing, in no small part because the ongoing digitisation of Georgian London’s archival records is helping historians to focus in more closely as well as trace complex patterns throughout the city.¹² This book contributes to this process, because the activity and influence of particular animals in one street could change dramatically in the next. By tracking their hoof- and paw-prints, I hope to show that Georgian London was a complex weave of variegated urban topographies, land uses and social types.

The study of animals in historical contexts has evolved dramatically over the last thirty years. The combined effect of the rise of environmental history and the ‘cultural turn’ since the 1970s has freed animals from their traditional home in agricultural-economic geographies and allowed them

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to roam across the humanities and social sciences. Looking at British history more specifically, however, the publication of Keith Thomas' classic *Man and the Natural World* in 1983 was a pivotal moment.¹³ Thomas' ambitious assessment of man's relationship to animals and plants in England from 1500 to 1800 firmly established non-human animals as a subject worthy of historical enquiry and remains a scholarly *tour de force*. At the same time, some of Thomas' arguments have provoked criticism. Most importantly, in the context of this book, Thomas claimed that by 1800 English urban societies had become alienated from animals, observing that the rise of new sentimental attitudes was 'closely linked to the growth of towns and the emergence of an industrial order in which animals became increasingly marginal in the processes of production'. Thomas acknowledged that working animals were 'extensively used during the first century and a half of industrialization' and that horses 'did not disappear from the streets until the 1920s' but 'long before that', he claimed,

most people were working in industries powered by non-animal means. The shift to other sources of industrial power was accelerated by the introduction of steam and the greater employment of water power at the end of the eighteenth century; and the urban isolation from animals in which the new feelings were generated dates from even earlier.

London represents the most advanced model for Thomas' hypothesis: here, above all other cities, he would expect to find 'well-to-do townsmen, remote from the agricultural process and inclined to think of animals as pets rather than as working livestock'.¹⁴ My research tests these assumptions and challenges conventional urban historiographies by exploring Georgian London as a human-animal hybrid, a city of beasts as well as a city 'full of people'.¹⁵ My argument is not just that animals occupied the city in force, it is that they underpinned its physical, social, economic and cultural development in diverse and fundamental ways.

I am not the first to question the idea that animals were peripheral in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century London, but in reassessing the relationship between animals and English society, previous studies have overwhelmingly focused on issues of animal cruelty and the rise of humanitarianism. Their central aim has been to show, in contrast to Thomas' view,

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that ‘it was not philosophical distance from sites of cruelty, but painful proximity to them which prompted Londoners’ protests’.¹⁶ While this approach is valuable, the tendency to consider human–animal histories as narratives of abuse also threatens to oversimplify complex relationships and the context in which they were formed. When considering the treatment of animals in this period, we have to remember that this was a city in which infants regularly died before they could walk; petty thieves were hanged or transported to penal colonies; servants and apprentices were violently abused; and children performed dangerous manual labour. The victim model has also led historians to neglect the multifaceted roles that animals played in Georgian society and to downplay their ability to make things happen. While, for instance, several scholars have discussed the ill-treatment of horses, there has been scant analysis of the economic significance of equine haulage, its impact on the construction and use of metropolitan space, or the challenges of commanding equine behaviour. Part of the problem has been that animal studies relating to England from 1500 to 1900 have tended to rely on theoretical sources, particularly philosophical and religious works; natural histories and Romantic literature.¹⁷ Many of those who produced this commentary viewed urban life from afar or had little or no personal experience of working with animals. Thus, while they reveal a great deal about animal symbolism, anthropomorphism, Romanticism and other developments in intellectual history, they do not tell us very much about tangible interactions between real people and real animals.¹⁸ Some historians have begun to challenge and depart from this approach – Ingrid Tague, for instance, has emphasised ‘the importance of lived experiences’ to ‘remind us that pets were not merely metaphors used to think about the world but living, breathing beings that had a direct impact on the lives of the humans with whom they interacted’¹⁹ – but there is much more work to be done.

As in other areas of historical enquiry, the cultural turn has guided animal studies into privileging, as John Tosh put it, ‘representation over experience’ and eliding ‘social history and its quest for the historical lived experience’.²⁰ One of the most striking consequences of this has been, as Tim Hitchcock complained in 2004, that academic history has largely

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abandoned ‘the experience of the poor’ to focus on ‘the words of the middling sort’ and the ‘glittering lives of the better off’.²¹ By contrast, this book is rooted in the rich seam of evidence generated by those who had first-hand experience of the urban beast, including the plebeian men, women and children who lived and worked with animals, as well as the magistrates, beadle, constables and watchmen who sought to regulate their behaviour on the streets. Instead of searching for the emergence of modern London ‘between the ears of the middling sort’, this book traces it through the dung-bespattered interactions that Londoners had with animals in the city. The key characters in this narrative are, therefore, not clergymen, writers or politicians, but London’s brewers, brick-makers, tanners, grocers, cow-keepers, coachmen, horse dealers, drovers, carters, grooms and warehousemen. Scholarly neglect of these largely plebeian Londoners goes some way to explaining why the city’s animals have also been so overlooked. Horses and livestock in Georgian England spent most of their lives with low-born workers but generally only attract attention when they were being ridden by, admired or painted for the elite. By foregrounding the city’s animals, therefore, this book hopes to give further momentum to the movement for social history from below.

While historians are now giving elite women attention, the lives of other female Londoners remain in the shadows. With the exceptions of cow- and ass-keeping, the occupations most closely associated with animals were almost exclusively held by men. Inevitably, therefore, this book reveals more about the working lives of men than it does those of women. Milkmaids are briefly discussed, as are female pig-keepers, but more importantly, this book shows that all female Londoners experienced and helped to create the city of beasts. While elite women rode or travelled in horse-drawn carriages, for instance, female pedestrians had to weave between horses to avoid being soiled, kicked or run over. At the same time, female demand for meat, milk, leather and diverse manufactured goods helped to fuel the city’s insatiable consumption of animal flesh and power.

Looking for evidence of human–animal interactions has given me the opportunity to draw lesser-known Londoners, including large numbers

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of low-paid workers, into the light for the first time. I have unearthed evidence from an array of sources including commercial, legal and parliamentary records; newspaper reports and adverts; diaries and personal correspondence; maps and architectural plans; paintings, prints and sketches. To begin to do justice to the lives of the people and animals recorded in this material, I hope to shift the focus of historical enquiry away from debates centred on intellectual history, the rise of kindness, humanitarianism and animal welfare legislation; towards the integration of animals into wider debates about urban life. In doing so, I want to reassess what Georgian London was, what the city was like to live in, how it functioned and what role it played in some of the major developments of the period.

Previous studies of this city have given the impression that the presence of animals was incongruous with the key manifestations of the capital's success in this period: thriving commerce, grand architecture and the fashionable lifestyles of polite society. In doing so, some historians have presented animals as generic case studies of nuisance. Emily Cockayne has, for instance, considered how people living in England from 1600 to 1770 'were made to feel uncomfortable' by the 'noise, appearance, behaviour, proximity and odours' of other beings. In Cockayne's survey of English towns, including London, pigs are reduced to 'notorious mobile street nuisances', dogs are condemned for barking and biting, and horses associated with producing copious amounts of stinking dung as well as being involved in accidents.²² These impressions echo the horror and disgust expressed by mid-nineteenth-century social and sanitarian reformers as they sought to cleanse London, Manchester and other cities of animal life in the name of human progress and urban improvement.²³ Yet, such a one-sided approach threatens to underestimate early modern urban governance, caricature the challenges posed by animal behaviour, ignore the positive contribution these actors made, and neglect the complexities of human–animal relationships.

City of Beasts challenges the dominant view of London's social history as being the product of human agency alone, but what do I mean by agency? Environmental historians have argued for decades that nature has agency but have not always made it clear what this entails. Animal

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historians have theorised non-human agency more thoroughly but some, together with a number of environmental historians, have been tempted to describe it as 'resistance'. This is problematic because 'resistance' is loaded with political meaning and deeply entwined with human psychology, but also because conflating animal recalcitrance, aggression and other behaviours with resistance makes an anthropomorphic assumption that animals are conscious of their oppression and can envisage an alternative future, as well as how to bring this about.²⁴ Furthermore, as Chris Pearson has argued, focusing on resistance immediately erects a barrier between human and non-human agents which conceals their 'close relationship' as well as how 'their ability to act is contingent on these historically situated relations'.²⁵ These are precisely the barriers which this book aims to break down and, like Pearson, I have found far more effective conceptualisations of agency emerging from the cross-disciplinary movement crystallising around Bruno Latour's work on actor-network theory. This argues that the social is performed by non-human things as much as by humans and that '*any thing*' that makes a difference to other actors is an agent.²⁶ Some scholars have argued that agency requires reason, intentionality and self-consciousness.²⁷ But there are compelling arguments against such a rigid position. Research into animal psychology, for instance, supports the idea that the behaviour of some animals can be accorded a degree of intentionality and it is possible to identify examples of this in Georgian London. I would also contend, however, that there are different and, in the context of this study, more influential forms of agency, including those which do not rely on intentionality. I will demonstrate that, despite obvious inequalities in power relations, horses, livestock and dogs were capable of influencing human behaviour in significant ways. As we will see, this included constraining and obstructing human activity but this study is primarily concerned with the ways in which non-human animals empowered, encouraged and made things possible for Georgian Londoners.²⁸ This is an approach that foregrounds the entwined lives of people and four-legged animals and considers what their quotidian interactions contributed to the evolution of Georgian London.

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Animals were so ubiquitous that tracking them down opens up remarkable new perspectives on unfamiliar or misunderstood social types, spaces, activities, relationships and forces which enable us to challenge assumptions about London's economic, social and cultural development. For the first time, non-human life takes centre stage in the major themes of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English urban history: commerce, trade and industry; the consumer revolution; urban expansion and improvement; social relations, crime and disorder.

Chapters 1 and 2 challenge two common misconceptions: first, that London played a marginal role in the Industrial Revolution and, second, that steam substituted animal muscle power. Despite recent calls to look beyond a narrow band of technological innovations and to acknowledge the existence of other British industrial revolutions in which human industriousness played a key role, historians continue to focus on steam power and sideline horses. This book offers an alternative to innovation-centric accounts of technological progress and undermines the notion that the supposed 'failure' to substitute new for old is to be explained by conservatism, lack of ambition or ignorance.²⁹ These opening chapters demonstrate that London's dependence on equine muscle power and the co-operation of men and horses increased dramatically in the Georgian period. Chapter 1 reveals that the mill horse helped to transform industrial production in the metropolis long before the introduction of Boulton and Watt's groundbreaking Sun and Planet type steam engine in the 1780s, and remained an effective power source in some trades well into the nineteenth century. Chapter 2 considers the contribution which the city's draught horses made to the metropolitan economy as manufacturing and international trade boomed, generating unprecedented demand for haulage by road. It reveals that the city's draught horses were valued for their intelligence as well as for their power, and explores the relationship between human and non-human co-workers as the challenges which they faced, side-by-side, intensified.

If Georgian London has been peripheral in orthodox studies of the Industrial Revolution, the city's bearing on the agricultural revolution has been made to appear equally obscure. We have been led to believe that

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Georgian Londoners were agriculturally unproductive, an impression that sits all too comfortably with twenty-first-century Western expectations of how a civilised city must function. Urban societies, particularly those in developed nations, are becoming increasingly alienated from the source of their food but Georgian London presents a very different form of urbanity at the start of the modern age, in which livestock were a familiar feature of the urban environment, and their relationship to consumers much more intimate. Chapter 3 examines the role played by urban cow- and pig-keeping in feeding the metropolitan population and shows that these activities adapted to urbanisation and industrialisation rather than becoming their victim in this period. Nevertheless, urban husbandry was far from able to satisfy the capital's voracious appetite for animal flesh. In a period predating refrigeration and railways, London relied on most of its meat being delivered alive and on the hoof from the English, Welsh and Scottish countryside by drovers. Chapter 4 reveals that the Smithfield livestock trade was a major sector of the metropolitan economy but also that its operations impacted on the lives of all Georgian Londoners. Smithfield's location meant that thousands of sheep and cattle had to be driven back and forth across the city, a system which not only brought disorder to the streets but also maximised the population's exposure to and interaction with these animals.

London's influential role in the consumer revolution has been studied from many different perspectives but the city's demand for animals has received remarkably little attention. In addition to its consumption of cows, sheep and pigs, the capital exerted a powerful draw on Britain's equine stock, and dominated the trade in riding and private coach horses. By 1800, thousands of these animals were sold in the city every year in a thriving economic sector that promoted innovative commercial practices. Chapter 5 examines the evolution and cultural significance of this trade but also proposes that these horses were voracious consumers in their own right and, therefore, demonstrated significant agency in the consumer revolution. Having established that riding and carriage horses were expensive and troublesome to maintain, Chapter 6 considers why so many Londoners opted to invest in them. The capital's recreational life has

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been the subject of numerous studies but these generally give the impression that assemblies, balls and concerts dominated the season and that Londoners only derived pleasure from sociability. Meanwhile, historians tend to associate the quintessentially Georgian pursuits of horse riding, racing and hunting with the countryside. I challenge these assumptions, revealing that London was the mainspring of British equestrian culture and that its residents dedicated huge amounts of time, money and energy to their animals. By studying tangible interactions between horse and rider, it becomes clear that the city's equestrian culture both facilitated sociability and offered an alluring alternative to human company.

Closely linked to rising consumption was the problem of property crime and a new way of exploring this is through London's relationship with dogs. Theft was a major concern in the Georgian period and, as numerous studies have shown, this led to major developments in crime prevention and punishment. But when thinking about dogs in Georgian England, historians have tended to focus on nuisance curs or cossetted lapdogs, giving the impression that the species was a hindrance to or a distraction from prosperity and police. Yet, as Chapter 7 reveals, dogs fulfilled a significant role in the metropolitan economy by guarding valuable property against thieves. In doing so, it challenges the impression that access to private space, a key battleground in Georgian power relations, was controlled solely by humans; and argues that the presence and behaviour of watchdogs shaped the urban experience of thousands of people.

City of Beasts invites readers to explore the Georgian metropolis and its population in a new light. This book does not set out to provide an encyclopaedia of animal life in the city. Instead, it focuses on the animals which a wealth of evidence suggests had the greatest impact. As a result, it largely omits birds, insects, fish, wild mammals (including rodents), stray and feral animals, as well as imported birds and beasts. Each deserves attention elsewhere and recent studies by Christopher Plumb and Ingrid Tague have already emphasised the cultural significance of exotics.³⁰ Yet, these creatures were, on the whole, caged objects of display, a condition which greatly restricted their interactions with people. This

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book concentrates on the animals that Georgian Londoners themselves viewed as being most 'useful' in their city; that is, horses, cattle, sheep, pigs and dogs. These were the animals that powered, fed and guarded the metropolis; but they also walked its streets and interacted, in one way or another, with the entire population.

NOTES

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