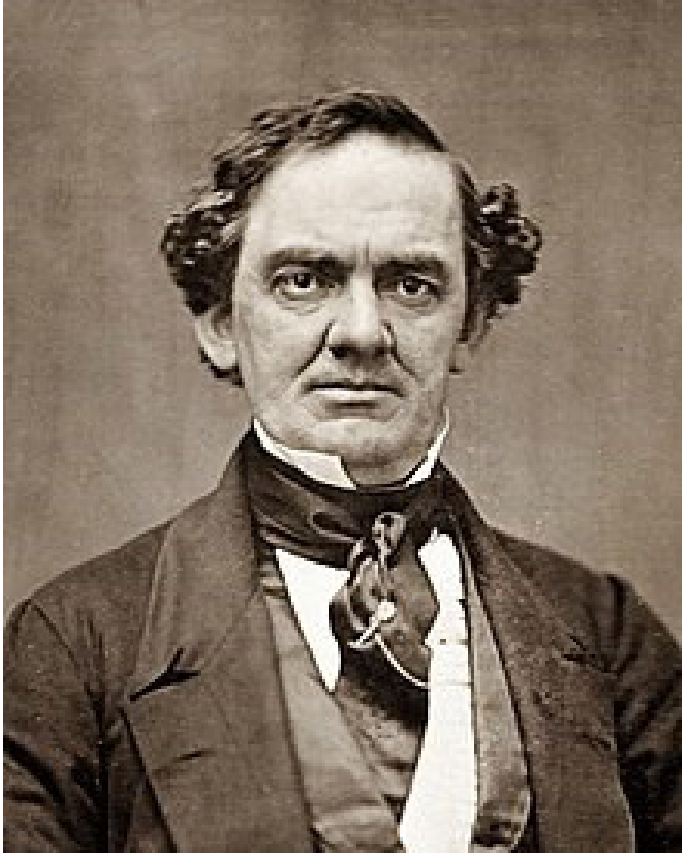


A Monkey's Tale



P.T. Barnum - a most remarkable showman in 19th century America began his career long before his famous circus was created in 1872. In January 1842, Barnum opened his American Museum in New York. The Museum was promoted as a place for family entertainment, enlightenment and amusement.

From 1842 until 1865, the American Museum grew into an enormous enterprise. Barnum's cryptozoology department in particular gained a lot of attention, from when he introduced his first major hoax: a creature with the head of a monkey and the tail of a fish, known as the "Feejee" mermaid. The Museum also contained a wax-figure department which produced likenesses of notable personalities of the day, an aquarium and a taxidermy department.



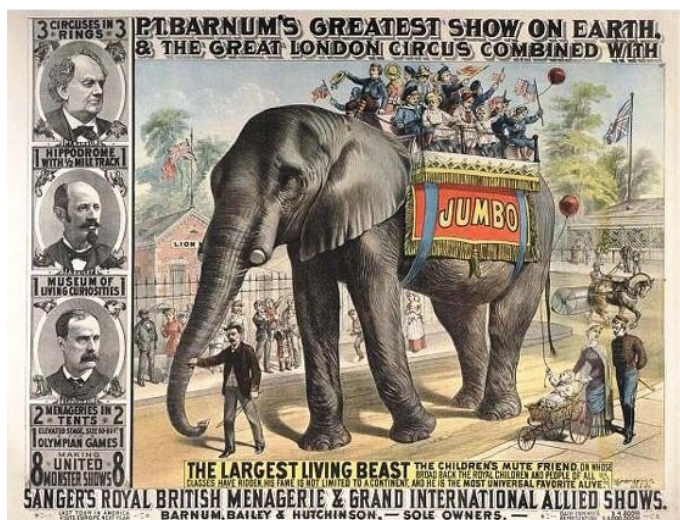
There were also living exhibits at his American Museum. Barnum exhibited a four-year-old boy who stood 25 inches high. This boy famously became known as General Tom Thumb, or Man in Miniature, who Barnum billed as an eleven-year-old. New York was fascinated by Tom Thumb and his popularity encouraged Barnum to arrange a tour around England where the company was given an audience of Queen Victoria, the royal family and many heads of states.

A Monkey's Tale

The circus which P.T. Barnum is famous for was his retirement project. Barnum was already a well-established entertainer but at 61 years old he began the "Greatest Show on Earth". He enthusiastically recruited many of his old friends and performers, seeking new and exciting acts to join his circus. In 1881 Barnum merged with James Bailey who had previously managed the Great London Show. Thereafter their circus became known as 'Barnum & Bailey's'.

Unlike any other circus Barnum & Bailey's was the first to display three rings, making it the largest in the world. One of the show's attractions was Jumbo, an African elephant that Barnum had bought from London Zoo in 1882 despite public outcry. Despite the diversity of Barnum & Bailey's circus performances the use of animals was the most renowned and often overshadowed the other acts.

For more about P.T. Barnum visit <https://barnum-museum.org/about/about-p-t-barnum/>



Barnum's Mandrill

Barnum and Bailey's Circus travelled in four trains of 15 coaches, with most of the carriages accommodating animals. In 1899, Barnum and Bailey's circus came to Bristol and paraded through Lower Ashley Road.

Many of the animals that Barnum brought for his acts originated from city zoos such as the famous elephant, Jumbo and there are records of Barnum purchasing animals from Bristol Zoo, such as a Bengal Tiger in 1894.



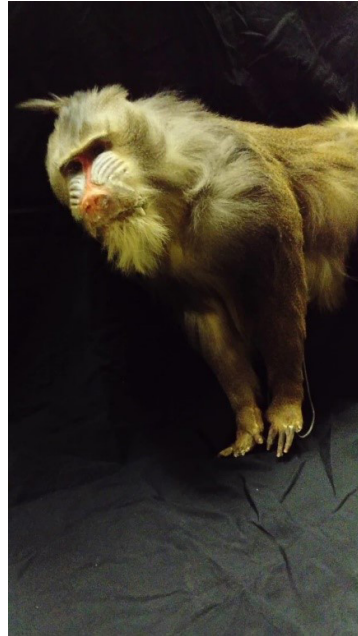
Barnum's parade on Lower Ashley Road, 1899 from the Lantern Slides collection at the Reference Library

Barnum And Bailey's Circus visited Bristol in 1898 and 1899 and paraded through the city on both occasions. To see a map of their route visit <https://arcr.is/1u9vWv0>

A newspaper report in the Bristol Mercury and the Daily Post in 1899 revealed a mandrill which had died on tour had been sent to Bristol Museum's taxidermy department. It was discovered that the museum's curator in 1911 catalogued a mandrill which was donated by Barnum and Bailey. Much to the excitement of everyone involved the donated mandrill was still in storage, all be it a bit worse for wear.

Soon after the discovery was made the museum prioritised the mandrill's conservation in preparation to be displayed once again within the museum, celebrating the 250 years of the modern circus.

Before...



...and after

Particular thanks to the museum staff; Gail Boyle, Amber Druce, Claudia Hildebrandt, Joan Passey and Rhian Rowson who collectively helped us to explore this extraordinary story and to Dr Kate Holmes for discovering the first clues and sharing her extensive knowledge with us.



Photographs of the conservation of Barnum's mandrill, courtesy of Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery