



CHAPTER 4

Love me, love my pet

ARTY TYPES

IN CHAPTER 3 we saw that the vast majority of US presidents shared their homes with at least one pet. Could the same be said of famous authors and artists?

Certainly many writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries owned and admired cats and dogs. Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, William Wordsworth, and Thomas Hardy were all fond of their pets, and Lewis Carroll created one of the most iconic feline images ever, through his Cheshire Cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. What's more, both cats and dogs have long been the favoured subjects of painters – no surprise to those of us who admire the aesthetics of our pets.

Today, images of cats in particular are found on a huge variety of products and it is estimated that there are 1,000 shops in the US selling nothing but cat-themed items.

Interestingly, products featuring dogs seem not to sell as well.¹ One reason for this, merchandisers say, is that dog people are breed-oriented, so a poodle owner will probably not buy a mug with a German shepherd on it. A cat lover, on the other hand, will buy any and every kind of feline depiction. Hmm, guilty as charged.

In some cases the pets of artists and writers probably have provided much-needed companionship in what can be rather solitary professions. It's easy to imagine the dog curled at the feet of Tennyson or the cat lying languidly across the pages of Samuel Johnson's great work in progress, probably batting the writer's feather quill from time to time with his paws.

In others they were no doubt a direct source of inspiration. But whatever their role, many of these pets have gone on to be immortalised with statues and monuments. Let's take a look at these next.

THE STORY OF BYRON AND BOATSWAIN

With his moody good looks and eccentric aristocratic lifestyle, Byron (1788-1824) has long been credited as one of Britain's most accomplished romantic poets. He was also 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know', according to his lover, Lady Caroline Lamb. A rather irresistible description that only serves to make him sound more exciting.

In addition to his writing, Byron is also known for his love of animals and the fact that he shared his homes in England, Italy, Switzerland, and Greece with many of all shapes and sizes. The wonderfully bizarre nature of his menageries is illustrated in a letter by fellow poet Percy Shelley, who was a good friend of Byron:

Lord B.'s establishment consists, besides servants, of ten horses, eight enormous dogs, three monkeys, five cats, an eagle, a crow, and a falcon; and all these, except the horses, walk about the house, which every now and then resounds with their unarbitrated quarrels, as if they were the masters of it. . . . I find that my enumeration of the animals in this Circean Palace was defective. . . . I have just met on the grand staircase five peacocks, two guinea hens, and an Egyptian crane.²



Byron seems to have been pretty determined not to be without animals at any stage of his life. While I was at University and missing my pets from home, I must admit to occasionally encouraging local cats into my room so I could get a bit of a cat fix. Well, Byron went several stages further. On attending Trinity College he circumvented University rules banning dogs by taking his tame bear along instead. It seems there was no mention in the college rulebook about bears not being allowed!

But of all the wondrous beasts sharing Byron's life, it is perhaps dogs that pulled on his heartstrings most, and of all the dogs he owned, his favourite seems to have been a Newfoundland called Boatswain.

Originally developed in the place of their name in Canada to assist the fishermen, the Newfoundlands' coat and webbed feet made them great swimmers able to cope with the extreme cold of Canadian waters. Striking and impressive in appearance, they were also known for their gentle natures and soon stories began circulating of the dogs performing heroic deeds. Because of this, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Newfoundlands became highly prized and owning one was considered something of a status symbol. This surge in their popularity was

not lost on the perspicacious Newfoundlanders who soon began breeding dogs in Canada especially for export to Britain.³ It is said that when the puppies arrived at ports around the UK they were greeted by crowds of excited people eager to purchase them.

Byron acquired Boatswain, who was probably a Newfoundland cross, when he was just fifteen years old. Perhaps one of the reasons the two bonded so well was that Boatswain brought an element of stability to Byron's days. The poet certainly lived a life of controversy. He is reported to have had many affairs and even intimate relations with his half-sister. As was the custom at this time, he would send locks of hair to his lovers. However, DNA analysis shows that most came not from the fine head of the poet himself but from a dog, quite possibly Boatswain! Perhaps there were so many amours that Byron simply didn't have sufficient hair to send to them all, whereas the shaggy Boatswain would have had it in abundance.

In 1808, aged just twenty, Byron took up residence at Newstead Abbey in Nottinghamshire. The Abbey has a large lake and the story goes that the poet would row into the middle with Boatswain and his other Newfoundland in the boat. He'd then leap

FIGURE 47 (opposite): Painting of Boatswain by Clifton Tomson. You may be forgiven for thinking that Boatswain does not look that typical of today's Newfoundlands. In his beautiful book on Byron³, Geoffrey Bond notes that the exact origins of the Newfoundland are shrouded in mystery, with some claiming them to be the descendants of mastiff-like dogs and others pointing to an Eskimo dog/husky ancestor. While early Newfoundlands showed considerable diversity in size and shape, they all seemed to have possessed a suitably noble mien.

overboard and get the dogs to ferry him back to shore. Interestingly, amongst the many Victorian tales of Newfoundlands saving people from drowning, there are some less flattering reports of dogs so obsessed with rescuing that they would grab hold of people enjoying a pleasant dip and determinedly drag them ashore against their will!³

Sadly, Byron's time with his much-loved dog was not to last long. Less than a year after moving to Newstead, Boatswain contracted rabies. It was thought he must have been bitten by another dog when he was following the post boy to the nearby village of Mansfield. In the early nineteenth century, rabies was common throughout England and a cause of understandable fear. So much so, in fact, that the government offered a reward of up to five shillings for each rabid dog killed.⁴

Distraught, Byron remained with the terribly ill Boatswain, nursing him and putting himself at considerable risk in doing so. Despite all his efforts, the dog could not be saved. In a letter Byron wrote to his friend and fellow writer Francis Hodgson, he said, 'Boatswain is dead! He expired in a state of madness on the 18th suffering much yet retaining all the gentleness of his nature to the last, never attempting to do the least injury to those near him.'⁵

After the death, and despite being much in debt, Byron commissioned a marble monument for his Boatswain at Newstead on the site of the former Abbey's ruins.

The epitaph, which has become one of Byron's best-known works, and its introduction, written by his friend John Cam Hobhouse (in italics), reads as follows:⁶

*Near this Spot
are deposited the Remains of one
who possessed Beauty without Vanity,*

'Newfoundland dogs are good to save
children from drowning, but you must
have a pond of water handy and a child,
or else there will be no profit in boarding a
Newfoundland.'

Josh Billings

*Strength without Insolence,
Courage without Ferocity,
and all the virtues of Man without his Vices.*

*This praise, which would be unmeaning Flattery
if inscribed over human Ashes,
is but a just tribute to the Memory of
Boatswain, a Dog
who was born in Newfoundland May 1803
and died at Newstead Nov. 18th, 1808*

When some proud Son of Man returns to Earth,
Unknown to Glory, but upheld by Birth,
The sculptor's art exhausts the pomp of woe,
And storied urns record who rests below.
When all is done, upon the Tomb is seen,
Not what he was, but what he should have been.
But the poor Dog, in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still his Master's own,
Who labours, fights, lives, breathes for him alone,
Unhonoured falls, unnoticed all his worth,
Denied in heaven the Soul he held on earth –
While man, vain insect! hopes to be forgiven,
And claims himself a sole exclusive heaven.

Oh man! thou feeble tenant of an hour,
Debased by slavery, or corrupt by power –
Who knows thee well, must quit thee with disgust,
Degraded mass of animated dust!
Thy love is lust, thy friendship all a cheat,
Thy tongue hypocrisy, thy heart deceit!
By nature vile, ennobled but by name,
Each kindred brute might bid thee blush for shame.
Ye, who behold perchance this simple urn,
Pass on – it honours none you wish to mourn.
To mark a friend's remains these stones arise;
I never knew but one – and here he lies.



DR JOHNSON AND HIS 'VERY FINE CAT'

Samuel Johnson (1709-84) may not have had the brooding looks of Byron, but he is counted as one of Britain's finest literary figures. He was a prolific writer who produced essays, biographies, poetry, and critiques. But probably his most famous work was his *Dictionary of the English Language*, a mammoth undertaking that took over eight years (although, the fact that he rarely got up before midday may have partly explained why it took so long). Completed in 1755, it contains quite a few amusing definitions such as:

Dull: Not exhilarating [*sic*]; not delightful; as, to make dictionaries is dull work

Mouth-friend: Someone who pretends to be your friend

The dictionary was not replaced for an incredible 150 years, when the *Oxford English Dictionary* was published. As if these accolades weren't enough, according to the *Oxford Book of Quotations*, Johnson is also the most quoted Englishman after Shakespeare.

Born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, to a bookseller, poor Johnson's life was certainly not without adversity. When he was born he was baptised immediately, as it

wasn't thought he'd survive. As a baby he had problems with his sight and hearing, and catching tuberculosis at the age of two seems to have left him with facial scarring. Clearly an intelligent boy, he went to study at Oxford University, but had to leave after a year since his parents could no longer afford the fees. Without a degree, Johnson found it difficult to fulfil his dream of becoming a teacher. He was also hampered by what were considered strange mannerisms or tics. These are now thought to be the symptoms of Tourette's, but at the time they led some to conclude that Johnson was intellectually inferior. Scholars also believe he suffered various bouts of depression and may have contemplated suicide. With all this to cope with, perhaps it is no wonder that one of Johnson's quotes states that 'It is by affliction chiefly that the heart of man is purified.'

And indeed, Johnson seems to have been very pure of heart, being a sociable and highly compassionate man. He disapproved of slavery and bequeathed his estate to a former slave from Jamaica after he and his family came to work for him. He helped others who were stricken down by poverty and of course he was a cat lover, having at least two cats, Hodge and Lily. In his biography of Johnson, his good friend, the lawyer Boswell, who clearly was not a cat fan, states,

FIGURE 48 (opposite): Lexi at Boatswain's tomb.

The large, ornate urn was a common decoration from the late 1700's and is thought to symbolise the liberation of the soul. Byron was active in the classical debate raging at the time as to whether animals had souls.

The poet had wished to be buried with his favourite dog, a wish that was sadly denied by the new owners of the Abbey. (He is interred instead at the Church of St Mary Magdalene nearby.)⁷ His request seems to resonate increasingly with pet owners today, and in the last decade planning permission has been granted in the UK for more and more joint animal/human cemeteries.

BYRON AND BOATSWAIN

Newstead Abbey Historic House and Park, Ravenshead, Nottinghamshire NG15 8NA. Admission fee applies.

In addition to the memorial at Newstead, there is also a statue of Byron, looking magnificent in his thoughtfulness with Boatswain in London. Unfortunately, this beautiful monument is marooned in a sea of traffic meaning you will need to have something of a death wish to view it up close. Behind Apley House on a traffic island in Park Lane, off Hyde Park, London W1.

I never shall forget the indulgence with which he treated Hodge, his cat: for whom he himself used to go out and buy oysters, lest the servants having that trouble should take a dislike to the poor creature. I am, unluckily, one of those who have an antipathy to a cat, so that I am uneasy when in the room with one; and I own, I frequently suffered a good deal from the presence of this same Hodge. I recollect him one day scrambling up Dr Johnson's breast, apparently with much satisfaction, while my friend smiling and half-whistling, rubbed down his back, and pulled him by the tail; and when I observed he was a fine cat, saying, 'Why yes, Sir, but I have had cats whom I liked better than this;' and then as if perceiving Hodge to be out of countenance, adding, 'but he is a very fine cat, a very fine cat indeed.'⁸

Boswell also noted how Johnson cared for Hodge when the cat was nearing his end by going out to buy valerian, presumably to bring about drowsiness and ease the poor cat's suffering.

Were Dr Johnson's slightly indulgent views on cats representative of many at the time? Seemingly not. Cats and kittens do occasionally feature in art from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but much less frequently than dogs.⁹ Their appeal broadened among the wealthy in the Victorian era, partly thanks to the interest in Egyptology and the reverence ancient Egyptians held for their felines, and partly as a result of Queen Victoria, who, while mostly known for her love of dogs, also showed an interest in cats. However, among the middle and poorer classes, they were still chiefly seen as rodent catchers.

The bronze statue of Hodge by Jon Bickley was unveiled in 1997 by Lord Mayor of London, Sir Roger Cook, in a courtyard outside Johnson's house, which is now a museum dedicated to the writer. Hodge is shown sitting on top of Johnson's dictionary, next to some empty oyster shells. The monument is inscribed with the words 'a very fine cat indeed'. It is interesting that the City of London chose to commemorate Johnson through his cat rather than by a statue of himself or some other kind of memorial. (See reference for a discussion on this.¹⁰)

Bickley modelled the statue on his own cat and ensured that Hodge sits at about waist height, 'just right,' so he said, 'for adults to put their arm around.'¹¹ In the short time I was there taking photographs I never witnessed anyone hug Hodge, but I did watch three different groups of people come by specifically to see him and use their mobile phones to listen to his story, for Hodge is one of London's talking statues – monuments that come to life with the voice of a celebrity telling their story.

Just before taking my leave, and after looking around to check no one was looking, I went up to Hodge to say goodbye – and, oh, give him a quick hug.

A PAINTER AND HIS PUG: WILLIAM HOGARTH

The website of the West London information agency, ChiswickW4, playfully suggests that while Chiswick may not have a Trump Towers as in New York, it is almost certainly the only place in Britain to have a statue to Trump.¹² In this case, Trump the pug!

Unveiled by The William Hogarth Trust on 10 November 2001 to coincide with the Chiswick painter's birthday, the statue features the famous



HODGE

17 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE, opposite the Samuel Johnson museum.

FIGURE 49: The inscription on the monument reads:

Hodge, 'a very fine cat indeed' belonging to Samuel Johnson (1709 -1784) of Gough Square.
'Sir, when a man is tired of London he is tired of life: for there is in London all that life can afford.'
'The chief glory of every people arises from its authors.'

artist with his pet pug, who shares the president's name. At first the statue was planned without the pug, but the Trust felt the addition of the dog would help reflect Hogarth's kindness and humanity. Every year since, on Hogarth's birthday, a wreath of flowers has been placed on the statue.

Hogarth (1697-1764) is thought to be the first English artist to attract international attention. As well as being a renowned painter, engraver, and cartoonist, he was also someone who wore his heart very much on his painter's smock sleeve and was an active campaigner against injustice. Perhaps this was because his father fell on hard times during Hogarth's childhood and ended up in debtor's prison.

Hogarth was also a great satirist whose work often featured the seamier side of London life. Two of his best-known engravings, *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street*, aimed to show the evils of consuming cheap gin compared to the merits of drinking beer! These engravings helped bring in the Gin Act of 1751 that reduced the number of shops selling the spirit cheaply.

In the same year, Hogarth produced *The Four Stages of Cruelty* in which he depicts the bad treatment of animals, something he saw all around him and that troubled him deeply. He was also fond of children, and although he and his wife never had their own, they did foster some from the local Foundling Hospital. Perhaps Hogarth's most famous work is his self-portrait with his pug, which inspired the Chiswick monument.

Looking at the statue of Trump, you are likely to be struck by how different he looks to the pugs of today.

He is considerably longer in the legs and his face is not as flattened. Pugs are believed to have descended from Chinese happa dogs and were brought from that country to Europe some 400-500 years ago when countries like the Netherlands and Portugal were trading in Asia. Once in Europe they were developed into their current form via selective breeding – where individual dogs with desired traits are mated.¹³ In 1873, when the UK Kennel Club was founded, it produced standards for each dog breed based on the work of the early breeders. This was the template for those breeding dogs to aspire to and the standard they would be judged against at shows. Unfortunately, characteristics that the Victorians and later generations had found desirable were not always in the animal's best interest and could lead to serious health problems.

To help correct this, the Kennel Club began revising the standards and in 2009 launched the online health tool, Breed Watch.¹⁴ This aims to provide information on breed-specific health concerns, which, in the case of the pug includes difficulty breathing and excessively prominent eyes. Judges at dog shows are now able to report on these problems and breeders should no longer select dogs for mating that have such exaggerated traits.

You can see the statue of Hogarth and Trump in Chiswick; endearingly, The William Hogarth Trust also commissioned a copy of Trump for the playground of The William Hogarth School. So now the children have their very own pug to play with.¹⁵

WALTER SCOTT (1771-1832) AND HIS LOVE FOR DOGS

Maida, Camp, Spice, Nimrod, Ginger, and Triton were all dogs owned and beloved by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). Scott was a hugely successful poet and the author of classics such as *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy*.

HOGARTH AND TRUMP

147 Chiswick High Road, Chiswick, London W4 2DT.
You can view the portrait at Tate Britain, London
SW1P 4RG (Display room 1730).

FIGURE 50: Hogarth in painting pose with Trump. It is interesting that Trump is not looking up devotedly at his owner, as are many of the dogs in older sculptures. (see figs 51-54 for example). Perhaps this reflects the modernity of the piece, although having known several excellent pugs I can affirm that they only looked at me devotedly when I was eating!

His stories, which were packed with romance and chivalry, are thought by many to be the world's first historical novels and his Waverley books provided the name for Edinburgh's Waverley railway station.

Certainly, there can be little doubt that Scott loved his dogs and many portraits of the writer include the animals sitting or lying at his feet. One of his favourites was Camp, a bull terrier that he acquired at the time of his marriage in 1797. In a description of Camp, he describes the terrier thus:

He was of great strength and very handsome, extremely sagacious faithful and affectionate to the human species and possessed of a great turn for gaiety and drollery. Although he was never taught any tricks he learned some of his own accord and understood whatever was said to him as well as any creature I ever saw. His great fault was an excessive ferocity towards his own species which sometimes brought his Master and himself into dangerous scrapes.¹⁶

When Camp died, Scott buried him in his garden opposite the window where he would sit writing. He was clearly much affected by the loss and states in a letter, 'I was rather more grieved than philosophy admits of & he has made a sort of blank which nothing will fill up for a long while.'

Sentiments that will no doubt strike a chord with many pet owners today. In fact, Scott seems to have pondered a good deal over the death of his dogs and is also quoted as saying,

I have sometimes thought of the final cause of dogs having such short lives and I am quite satisfied it is in compassion to the human race;



for if we suffer so much in losing a dog after an acquaintance of ten or twelve years, what would it be if they were to live double that time?

After Scott himself died, a competition was held to design a monument in Edinburgh to his memory. Enter joiner and carpenter George Meikle Kemp. Son of a poor shepherd, Kemp had a burning passion for architecture, but no qualifications. Fearing this might count against him, he submitted his design under the pseudonym John Morvo, a sixteenth-century mason who worked on Melrose Abbey. In actual fact his true identity was accidentally discovered by the judges, but it didn't matter. Subject to a few amendments, Kemp's design was selected and he was given the contract.

The structure Kemp designed is reported to be the world's largest monument to a writer. Within the columns of this 200ft-high, gothic tower is a marble statue of the man himself, designed by John Steele. The statue shows Scott sitting with quill pen in hand, while his deerhound, Maida, gazes up at him. Maida was named after a Napoleonic battle and he (for Maida was a male dog) also appears in a statue guarding the entrance to Scott's home – Abbotsford.

If you feel reasonably fit and don't suffer from vertigo, it is well worth climbing the narrow, spiral staircase to the top of the Scott Monument. It is nearly 300 steps in all, but there are opportunities to rest on the way and you can admire some amazing views while you get your breath back. There are sixty-eight mini statues on the monument, each representing a



THE SCOTT MONUMENT

The Scott Monument is lit up every night. It can be found at E. Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh EH2 2EJ.

'You think dogs will not be in heaven? I tell you, they will be there long before any of us.'

Robert Louis Stevenson

FIGURE 51: Walter Scott and Maida (Edinburgh). Scott described Maida as 6ft long and iron strong.

FIGURE 52 (opposite): Tennyson and his dog outside the beautiful Lincoln Cathedral.

character from one of Scott's books, and if you look closely you may spot the farmer Dandie Dinmont from the novel *Guy Mannering*. Dinmont has a little dog at his feet that went on to become a recognised breed – the Dandie Dinmont terrier.¹⁷

The sight of this enormous and beautiful monument, with all its intricate miniature sculptures, is something to behold, but sadly its story is not without tragedy. A few months before it was due to be inaugurated, Kemp was walking along the Union Canal to his home in Morningside. It seems he must have lost his way in the fog that had descended and he fell into the water and drowned.

Kemp is buried in St Cuthberts churchyard in a grave facing the monument he designed.

MORE WRITERS AND THEIR DOGS

Tennyson The poet Lord Tennyson (1809-92) is remembered in Lincoln, the place of his birth, with a statue in the grounds of Lincoln Cathedral. This impressive monument is the work of George Frederick Watts, a friend of Tennyson's, who began the sculpture a year after the poet's death, when he himself was in his eighties. Sadly, Watts never got to see his work unveiled, as he died a year before it was erected. The statue also shows Tennyson's dog, a wolfhound known as Karenina. There is a dastardly rumour that Karenina was only added to stop the

statue toppling over. However, I prefer to think that she, and the flower in the writer's hand, were added to celebrate Tennyson's love of nature and animals. Lincoln Cathedral, Lincoln LN2.

Robert Louis Stevenson penned such classics as *Treasure Island* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. His endearing statue may be viewed in a village just outside Edinburgh – Colinton Parish Church, Dell Road, Colinton, Edinburgh EH13 0JR.

Burns **Robert Burns** (1759-96) died aged just thirty-seven, but in his short lifetime he produced many celebrated literary works, including the incomparable New Year's favourite: 'Auld Lang Syne'. Among Burns' greatest loves was his border collie, Luath (a name meaning swift or fleet in Gaelic). The two were said to be inseparable and there is a suggestion that Burns met his future wife, Jean Armour, after she chased the dog away from playing with some washing she'd put out to dry. Statues of Burns with his faithful dog, Luath, can be found in various countries including: Sturt Street, Ballarat, Victoria and Centenary Place, Brisbane, Australia; Winthrop Square and The Fenway in Boston, Massachusetts; and Greyfriars Church, Dumfries, Scotland.

James Herriot The much-loved Yorkshire vet and writer, whose real name was Alf Wight, is celebrated in a statue where he is shown holding a little dog. The World of James Herriot, 23 Kirkgate, Thirsk YO7 1PL.





FIGURE 53 (above): Robert Louis Stevenson and Cuillin in Edinburgh.

FIGURE 54 (right): Robbie Burns and his faithful Luath (Ballarat, Australia)



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