



Foreword

GRAVESTONES LEAVE ME WITH mixed feelings. Some, such as the First World War graves, pertinently mark significant moments in our history. I once toured those fields of white stones in France and, although I had no known relatives laid to rest there, I was profoundly moved by their horrific scale and overwhelmed by an enormous sense of tragedy. Curiously, it was the impersonality that was so affecting: ‘Known Unto God’ over and over and over again. These tombstones carry a large, powerful, and important message to us all over many years.

But the overblown and vainglorious statuary marking the graves of the long-gone idle rich leave me dead cold. How dare they think that we would continue to care? The cheek of it! I’m so pleased to see their aspirations of immortality neglected and overgrown by nature and to know their bodily remains have fed the ivy that obscures their names. Most graves are aptly temporary in the grand scheme of things, tended for two or three generations at most while they play a critical part in the painful grieving process. After that, their job is done. Few of us are important enough to be remembered for any longer.

The memorials catalogued here are different. Of course, for the owners or carers of the dogs and cats they are a place to contemplate their loss, but collectively they say a lot about us. This fascinating and revealing book spans the globe and a vast range of ages, but I

challenge you to read any one account and not feel empathy for the animal they celebrate. It leaps from heartbreak to wonder, from heroism to love, and from joy back to heartbreak again. And the tales in themselves are remarkable, surprising, and entertaining. Some of the animals are familiar, but others not so much. Most dog lovers will have heard of Greyfriars Bobby, but few will know the truth behind this amazing story. Some tell tales of fame from overseas: Balto the sled dog, once a national treasure in the United States, and Tombili the portly cat from Istanbul that caused an Internet sensation. And the book even rewrites history. Ernest Shackleton has always been a hero of mine – his boat journey across the south polar seas to rescue his men was hugely inspirational. It was made possible through the skills of the carpenter who had adapted their vessel to withstand the harsh environs. But now I’ve learned that ‘The Boss’ (Shackleton) had the carpenter’s cat shot and that the carpenter was denied the coveted Polar Medal. Maybe Sir E was not the man I thought he was!

I honestly couldn’t put this book down, perhaps because collectively these stories are a fitting memorial and reassuring reminder that, for all our human ills, our deep love for our companion animals is truly immortal.

Chris Packham
New Forest, 2018