

Fig. 2: Chiswick House from the garden in 1823 by J Gendall. The wings were added by the fifth duke of Devonshire in 1778 but demolished by the Ministry of Works in 1952



*months, a very handsome female of the species consigned to his care.*⁹

If this anecdote is true, the 'lady of rank' must have been the marchioness of Hastings, who, according to a later account in the *Morning Chronicle*, supplied the duke with his elephant.¹⁰ The duke's Chiswick and Sutton Court accounts reveal that Walter Elliot, the elephant keeper, received the first quarterly instalment of his salary from 25 December 1811, so the elephant was there by that date.¹¹ From 1820 John Leggrove was paid for food for the elephant, and, as he later kept the monkeys and birds at Chatsworth, he may have been a subsequent elephant keeper.

The elephant was noted by Prince Pückler-Muskau in 1826: 'There is a menagerie attached to the garden, in which a tame elephant performs all sorts of feats and very quietly suffers anybody to ride him about a large lawn.'¹² And it was noted again by Sir Walter Scott in his diary on 17 May 1828:

The scene was dignified by the presence of an immense elephant, who under the charge of a groom wandered up and down, giving an air

⁹ 'The menageries, quadrupeds described and drawn from living subjects', *The Library of Entertaining Knowledge*, London, 1831, 7.
¹⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, 3 October 1818.
¹¹ Chatsworth, Devonshire MSS, L/114/51.
¹² Brennan, loc. cit.

*of Asiatick pageantry to the entertainment. I was never before sensible of the dignity which largeness of size and freedom of movement give to this otherwise ugly animal.*¹³

The elephant was kept in a house of large dimensions, well ventilated and arranged in every particular with a proper regard to the comfort of the animal. But she often had the range of a spacious paddock; and the exhibition of her sagacity was therefore doubly pleasing, for it was evidently not effected by rigid confinement.¹⁴

In this, as in most accounts, Sadi was female, but not in all. In an account of Sadi's party tricks he was apparently a bull:

We remember seeing him some years ago perform a variety of manoeuvres at the word of command. When told to dress himself, he would take down a scarlet cloak from a peg and throw it with a jaunty air over his ample shoulders; and then kneel down for any of the spectators to mount for a ride; after which he would replace his cloak, take up a bucket and fetch it full of water from the river, and seizing

¹³ Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. W E K Anderson, Edinburgh, 1998, 534.
¹⁴ 'The menageries, quadrupeds described and drawn from living subjects', loc. cit.

*a broom or a scrubbing-brush, would begin cleaning his house.*¹⁵

The elephant was also able to uncork a tightly stoppered soda water bottle, tip the contents into its trunk, and then into its mouth without spilling a drop.¹⁶

Sadi died in November 1828, apparently from pulmonary consumption.¹⁷ There is no record of where she or he was buried, but a handwritten note on a photograph of Burlington Lane, dated 1926, says 'inside the gates to Chiswick House is an obelisk always reputed to be set up over the grave of an elephant'.¹⁸ Since the obelisk was set up nearly 100 years before the elephant died this cannot be correct, but it might provide a clue to the location of the elephant's bones.¹⁹

There are competing claims as to who owned the first giraffe to be seen in England. Most published sources say that the first giraffe was sent as a diplomatic gift to George IV from the Pasha of Egypt in 1827 (Fig. 1).²⁰ Other sources claim that the giraffe was owned by the sixth duke of Devonshire and kept at Chiswick House,²¹ one claiming that the duke bought the giraffe to console himself after George Canning died at Chiswick House in 1827.²² This book cites the duke's letters and diaries as its reference. But the author has made a mistake – an understandable mistake since the duke uses phrases such as 'our own giraffe', and 'on coming home we met the giraffe caravan'. Closer inspection of the letters and diaries, however, shows that the duke was talking about the king's giraffe (the *English giraffe*; another had been sent to Paris).²³ At the time of the giraffe's arrival in August 1827, the duke was staying at Windsor, having been invited to attend the king's birthday dinner.²⁴ The king's giraffe arrived 'in a great caravan, big enough to hold her and her two cows'.²⁵ She was kept in the Royal Menagerie in Windsor Great Park and was an object of great curiosity. However, some misguided person advised the king that the poor creature should be fed only milk. On this mean diet the giraffe became very weak and a sling was

¹⁵ 'Walks in the neighbourhood of London', cit., 297.

¹⁶ 'The menageries, quadrupeds described and drawn from living subjects', loc. cit.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9; *John Bull*, 28 November 1827.

¹⁸ Chiswick Public Library, Local Studies Room, Picture Collection, Burlington Lane.

¹⁹ Richard Hewlings, *Chiswick House and Gardens*, London, 1989, 31; Jacques Carré, 'Through French eyes: Rigaud's drawings of Chiswick', *Journal of Garden History*, II, no. 2, 137.

²⁰ Vernon N Kisling (ed.), *Zoo and Aquarium History*, London, 2001



designed to keep her on her feet. Not surprisingly, she lived for only two years.²⁶

The duke might not have had the first giraffe in England, but he had four of them, conspicuously present at the gorgeous garden fête which he threw for the Emperor Nicholas of Russia and 700 other distinguished guests in June 1844 (Fig. 4). An article in the *Illustrated London News* suggests that the giraffes provided plenty of entertainment:

Fig. 3: Section from Peter Potter's 'Survey of Chiswick Mansion, Garden, Pleasure Garden, Park and Estate', dated 1818 and showing the layout of the house and grounds. The menagerie may have stood north of the bridge, centre left

(available online at <http://books.google.co.uk>), 57; *Caledonian Mercury*, 5 May 1828.

²¹ Claud Phillimore, 'Chiswick House', *Journal of the London Society*, no. 294, 1947, 43; John Pearson, *Stags and Serpents: The Story of the House of Cavendish and Dukes of Devonshire*, London, 1983, 127.

²² Pearson, loc. cit.

²³ www.austmus.gov.au/exhibitions/gould/entrepreneur/early-years.htm.

²⁴ Chatsworth, Devonshire MSS, 2nd ser. 767.451; sixth duke's group 1535.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Kisling, loc. cit.