

# THE BRITISH CAT FANCY

By Eileen Lentaigne\*

## THE PAST.

The first cat show in England was held at the Crystal Palace in 1871. In Victorian times this was one of London's great public buildings built originally for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park. Although it was intended to be merely temporary, it was so popular that it was removed to a permanent site in Sydenham, a London suburb, and reopened in 1854 being used for musical festivals, fireworks displays, exhibitions, etc. until it was destroyed by fire in 1936.

This first cat show was organized by Mr. Harrison Weir, a well-known cat fancier of the time, and was such a success that it became an annual event. For some years the exhibits were mostly shorthairs, the number of Angoras, as the longhairs were known at that time, being very few. A class which would be highly disapproved of today, when slimness is the vogue, was: "For Weight Only — A.V. or colour, gelded or not".

the scales at 25, seems fantastic have been a whole grossly over-though I have al boarder, called ian "christmas legs", who could a class and would, ceived a "Very mended" card. in those days the times, viz. Cats" and "Lamen's cats".

show was so pop-shows were held throughout the country and the interest shown by fanciers led to the formation of the National Cat Club in 1887, which was and still is the premier cat club of Great Britain. Mr. Harrison Weir was the



Mrs. Lentaigne and "Dandy"

Winners topped 23 and 20 lbs. It that there could class of these weight cats, alhad the occasion-by my veterinar-puddings on have entered such no doubt, have re-Highly Com-Two other classes were indicative of "Working Men's dies' and Gentle-

As the 1871 ular many other at various towns

club's first president and he was succeeded on his retirement by Mr. Louis Wain, the well known cat artist, who took a practical interest in the welfare of cats and was a committee member of the Society for the Protection of Cats. Show rules were drawn up by the newly formed committee and, with minor alterations and additions, are still the basic rules under which our shows are run today.

The first Championship show held by the National Cat Club in 1896 showed a large increase in the number of longhair exhibits — 204 longhairs against 111 shorthairs. I wonder if it is known why the longhair had become so popular—was it because the social scene had become so dull due to the semi-retirement of Queen Victoria that ladies of fashion spent more time in their homes grooming their cats and arranging their flowers!

From 1887 until 1910 the National Cat Club kept registers of official championships, acted as arbiters in all matters relating to cats and in 1893 issued the first stud book. However, in 1898 a rival club was formed — the Cat Club—which, discarding those of the National Cat Club, drew up its own rules, held several shows and issued its own stud book. Some of the existing clubs remained faithful to the National Cat Club while others broke away and attached themselves to the new club. For several years there was great unrest in the Fancy and many attempts were made to heal the breach and to amalgamate with the National once more. After many stormy meetings and the formation of a Cat Fanciers' Association, the National Cat Club, in an effort to bring about peace in the Fancy, invited the Cat Fanciers' Association to send three delegates to a meeting with three members of the National to consider what could best be done for the good of the Fancy as a whole. Nothing resulted from this first meeting but after further negotiations a conference of the Cat Fancy took place in March, 1910 when it was finally decided to form a Council to be called the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy. The National Cat Club agreed to hand over all its powers, registrations, etc. to this new body in return for which they were granted permanent representation on the Council and four delegates in perpetuity irrespective of their number of members.

## **THE PRESENT.**

Despite criticism of the Governing Council, which is bound to arise as no institution of this nature can please everybody all of the time, the fact remains that no breakaway Council has been formed and the G.C.C.F. remains the only governing body in the cat fancy in Britain. Within the last year or so it has been given a shot in the arm by the influx of new delegates from recently affiliated clubs. Whereas, in the past, affiliation did not of itself confer the right to representation but representation was granted at the discretion of the Council, this has now been changed and any club has the right to affiliation providing its membership is not less than 50. It is then automatically entitled to representation with one delegate for its 50 members and one in respect of every further 100, all delegates being elected annually by the club members.

We have no dissident clubs in Britain and the general feeling

throughout the Fancy is that if such a one came into being its life would be very short as it would receive very little support.

The constitution is at present in process of being revised but, as it is still under discussion, there is little I can say about the number of delegates, as explained above, the various committees must necessarily increase in size. More work will be undertaken by the Executive Committee, but the number of ordinary meetings of the Council will not be reduced.

### THE FUTURE.

Fifty-seven years since the birth of the G.C.C.F. and an organised Fancy — what will the future hold? I have no doubt that the Council will carry on quite happily, although probably in a very different form if the number of breeders and clubs increases at the same rate as during the last two decades. We already have 10 Siamese clubs, the Siamese Cat Club, founded in 1900, being the largest, but several of the others have been formed within recent years. For instance, the Siamese Cat Association, which came into being only 8 years ago, is now the second largest Siamese club.

The future really entirely depends upon kitten sales; so long as there is a demand and we do not reach saturation point growth in new clubs and membership will continue, but if sales should decline there will be fewer new breeders and established breeders will be forced to cut down on their number of brood queens. Fortunately there are no indications of this unhappy state of affairs coming to pass in the foreseeable future for the number of exhibits at shows is increasing every year. The difficulty now is to find halls which are large enough to accommodate present day shows. The National Cat Club, whose show is an annual "must" for all who are interested in cats, is held at Olympia and at the 1966 show there were approximately 1,365 cat and kitten exhibits of all breeds with a total number of 745 exhibitors. At the 1960 show, also held at Olympia, the total number of exhibits was 809 shown by 414 exhibitors. These figures alone show how the British Cat Fancy is expanding and we can be justifiably optimistic about the future.

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