

Object: Pair of pony shoes on hooves

Object Number(s): STMEA:A.2335

Researcher details: Dessa Hayes, Volunteer

These mounted pony hooves¹ first belonged to a Suffolk blacksmith named Edwin Ebenezer Runeckles.

About Edwin

Edwin was born 27 July 1862 in Stonham Earl (now Earl Stonham)^{2 3} to Susan Freeman and John Runeckles. According to the 1881 census, John was a blacksmith, sub postmaster and farmer with a 10-acre property.⁴ Aside from Edwin, John and Susan also had four other children: Betsy, Frederick, Robert and Mercy.

In 1884, Edwin married Alice Augusta Brundish.^{5 6 7} They lived at 18 Crowfield Rd in Pettaugh with their three children: Gilbert, Agnes and Beatrice. Gilbert would later become the postman at Forward Green.

Sometime before his death in 1923, Edwin's favourite pony died. He removed the pony's front hooves, made pony shoes for them and either plated them himself or had them plated. The hooves were polished and mounted on round wooden plaques. After Edwin's death, they passed to his sister Mercy's youngest daughter, Ivy Beatrice Cobbold.^{8 9} Ivy later donated the pony hooves to the Museum in 1969.

¹ Food Museum. *Pair of pony shoes on hooves*; STMEA:A.2335 [Internet]. Food Museum. 2019 [cited 2 May 2022]. Available from: <https://my.ehive.com/accounts/3978/objects/53983/pair-of-pony-shoes-on-hooves>

² djwsparkes. *Edwin Ebenezer Runeckles*. Sparkes Family Tree [Internet]. [cited 2 May 2022]. Available from: <https://www.ancestry.ca/family-tree/person/tree/14821268/person/234986637/facts>

³ General Register Office. *Births registered in July, August and September 1862*. England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915 [Internet]. 2006 [cited 2 May 2022];4a, 521. Available from: <https://search.ancestry.ca/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=8912&h=48006698&ssrc=pt&tid=14821268&pid=234986637&usePUB=true>

⁴ The National Archives of the UK. *Census returns of England and Wales, 1881* [Internet]. 2004 [cited 2 May 2022];RG11/1863, 105, 12. Available from: <https://search.ancestry.ca/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7572&h=20076647&ssrc=pt&tid=14821268&pid=234986637&usePUB=true>

⁵ General Register Office. *Marriages registered in July, August and September 1884*. England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915 [Internet]. 2006 [cited 2 May 2022];4a, 994. Available from: <https://search.ancestry.ca/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=8913&h=24992644&ssrc=pt&tid=14821268&pid=234986637&usePUB=true>

⁶ The National Archives of the UK. *Census returns of England and Wales, 1891* [Internet]. 2005 [cited 2 May 2022];RG12/1462, 154, 4. Available from: <https://www.ancestry.ca/discoveryui-content/view/23986198:6598?ssrc=pt&tid=14821268&pid=234986637>

⁷ Supra, 2

⁸ General Register Office. *Births registered in July, August and September 1904*. England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915 [Internet]. 2006 [cited 2 May 2022];4a, 990. Available from: https://search.ancestry.ca/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=8912&h=38299731&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2352

⁹ The National Archives of the UK. *Census returns of England and Wales, 1911* [Internet]. 2011 [cited 2 May 2022];RG14, Schedule 53. Available from: <https://search.ancestry.ca/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=2352&h=43622803&tid=&pid=&queryId=582fc13dcbdaa706dcf603fd6424336f&usePUB=true&phsrc=BUe1&phstart=successSource>

Why A Pony?

Nowadays, ponies are usually seen as childrens' riding mounts or petting farm animals. But in the past,



they weren't just adorable pets. They played a vital role in agriculture, mining and other industries.

Figure 1: A prize-winning Highland Pony, showing the typical physical characteristics of ponies.¹⁰

Why were ponies often favoured over horses as working animals? For one thing, ponies reach adulthood more quickly.¹¹ They can live 30 years or more and can work as draft animals into their late 20s. Although they are smaller than horses, ponies tend to be stockier, meaning they can carry a higher percentage of their body weight. As you can imagine, these traits made them particularly well-suited to heavy work in the fields and the mines.

Furthermore, thanks to their thicker coats and tougher hooves, ponies can thrive in harsher environments. Therefore, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust continues to use them as conservation grazers. They can graze in nutrient-poor areas that are unsuitable for local cattle.¹²

¹⁰ Confuslefu. *Gracie-rhs2005*. English Wikipedia. 2006 June 26 [cited 12 August 2022]. Available from: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gracie-rhs2005.jpg>. Attribution: Public Domain

¹¹ Blocksdorf, K. *The difference between horses and ponies* [Internet]. 2022 June 1 [cited 2 May 2022]. Available from: <https://www.thesprucepets.com/the-difference-between-horses-and-ponies-1886998>

¹² Barber, J. *Ponies on our nature reserves* [internet]. Suffolk Wildlife Trust. [cited 2 May 2022]. Available from <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/news/ponies-our-nature-reserves>

It is unknown exactly what role Edwin's pony played in the Runeckles household. Perhaps it was used to carry heavy loads. Or perhaps it was simply a beloved pet. Regardless of its purpose, the pony was clearly important enough to Edwin to merit an elaborate memorial plaque.

Animal Mourning

Edwin Runeckles wasn't the first person to lavishly memorialise his pet. In 326 BCE, Alexander the Great's beloved horse Bucephalus was killed at the Battle of Hydaspes.¹³ Alexander commemorated Bucephalus by naming a new city, "Bucephala", after him.

However, it wasn't until the Victorian era (c. 1837-1901 CE) that pet mourning reached its peak. Like humans, recently deceased pets were often commemorated through over-the-top, "sentimental" displays.¹⁴ In places like London's Hyde Park Pet Cemetery, dogs and other pets were interred under marble tombstones, bearing heartfelt epitaphs such as "Dear Impy - Loving and Loved".¹⁵ The poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti had his pet wombat Top stuffed and mounted in his house.¹⁶ Similarly, Michael Field (the pen name of aunt-and-niece duo Katherine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper) wrote a poetry book in memory of their dog Whym Chow.¹⁷ The book was structured like a Requiem Mass (a type of Christian funeral service) and

¹³ Trentin, S., and Sneed, D. *Alexander and Bucephalus* [Internet]. University of Colorado Boulder. 2018 June 19 [cited 2 May 2022]. Available from: <https://www.colorado.edu/classics/2018/06/19/alexander-and-bucephalus>

¹⁴ McDonnell J. 'This you'll call sentimental, perhaps': Animal death and the propriety of mourning. In: Gildersleeve J, editor. *Victorian vocabularies: refereed proceedings of the 2012 Australasian Victorian studies conference* [Internet]; 2012 Apr 11-14; Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. Sydney, Australia: Macquarie Lighthouse E-book Publishing; 2013 [cited 2 May 2022];7. Available from: https://www.academia.edu/4071319/This_youll_call_sentimental_perhaps_Animal_Death_and_the_Propriety_of_Mourning

¹⁵ Day, A. *Hyde park secret pet cemetery* [Internet]. Historic UK. 2017 [cited 2 May 2022]. Available from: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryMagazine/DestinationsUK/Hyde-Park-Secret-Pet-Cemetery/>

¹⁶ Supra, 14; 7-8

¹⁷ Ibid; 19-20

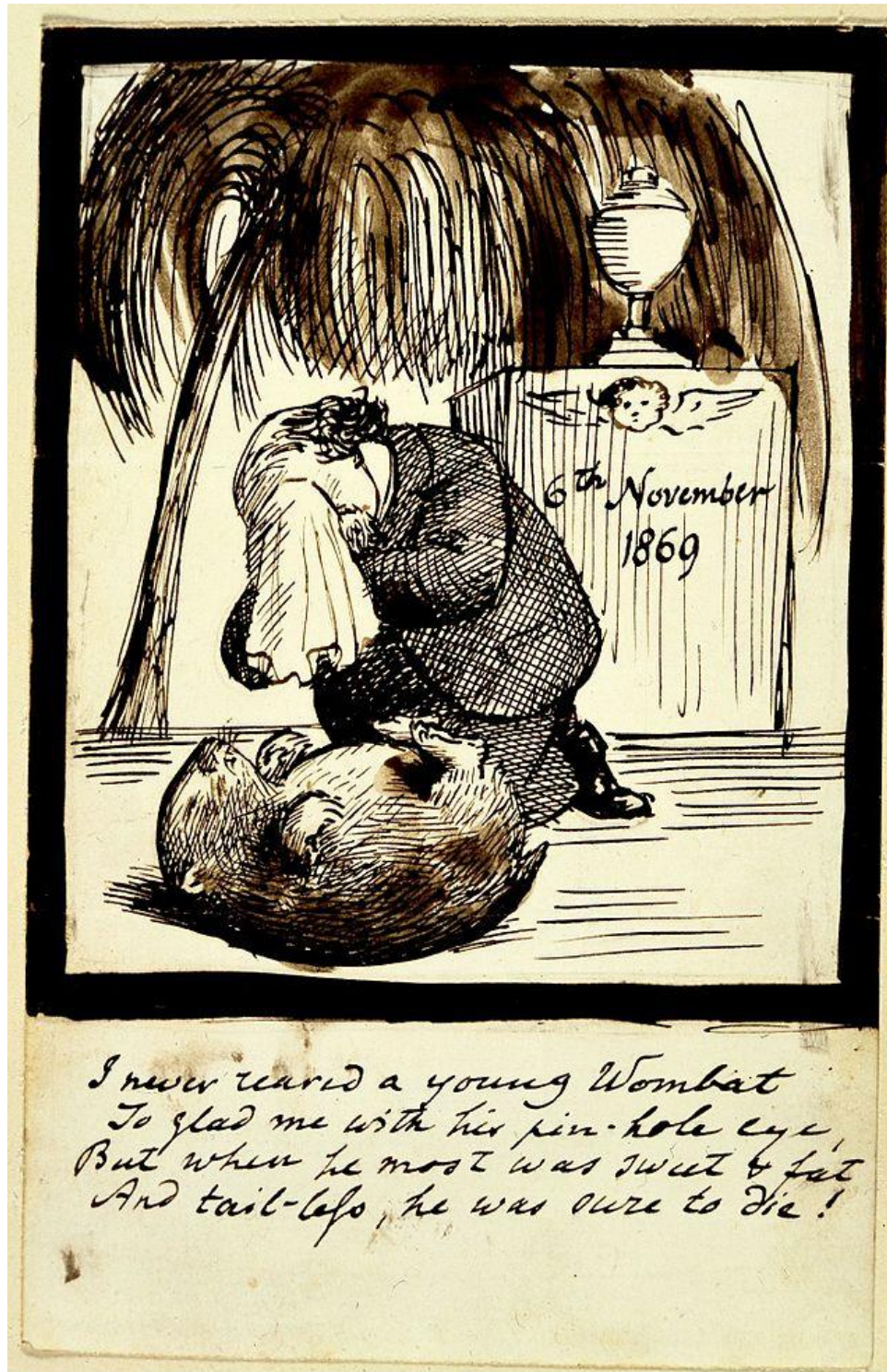


Figure 2: Ironically, Dante Gabriel Rossetti also wrote and illustrated a satirical poem called “Death of A Wombat”, which parodies Victorian pet mourning culture.¹⁸

¹⁸ Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Death of a wombat*. British Museum Online Database. 1869 Nov 6 [cited 12 August 2022]. Available from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death_of_A_Wombat.jpg. Attribution: Public Domain

was bound in a russet suede that mimicked Chow's fur.

Despite the popularity of pet mourning, many Victorians condemned it as the Biblical sin of "inordinate affection",¹⁹ as outlined by St Paul in his letter to the Colossians.²⁰ Non-human animals were seen as inferior and therefore unworthy of public grief.²¹ Additionally, these funerary practices were usually associated with women.²² Victorian society often stereotyped women as inferior people who were unable to overcome their emotions and be guided by reason. So, as a result, pet mourning was an easy target for male social critics of the day.

Although they might post-date the Victorian era, Edwin Runeckles' pony hooves are reminiscent of this mourning culture. They are a public statement of grief, memorializing his pony in a permanent way that has outlasted the lives of both Edwin and his niece (who died in 1988).²³ Because they were made by a male blacksmith, these pony hooves challenge the stereotype that only women grieved the loss of their pets. They also foreshadow the popular 21st-century view of pets as beloved family members who deserve to be mourned in their own right.

Other Runeckles Family Objects

If you're familiar with the Food Museum collections, you may recognize the name "Runeckles". We have many other objects owned by the family, including Gilbert's post office waistcoats and trousers (STMEA:1992-24.2, -24.7, -24.8 and -24.9), Mercy's sewing machine (STMEA:A.2297) and Katherine's slippers, which were made by her father Absolom (STMEA:A.2320).

¹⁹ Supra, 14; 12

²⁰ *Colossians 3:5 - King James version* [Internet]. Bible Gateway. [cited 2022 Aug 13]. Available from: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%203%3A5&version=KJV>

²¹ Supra, 14; 12

²² Ibid; 10

²³ General Register Office. *Ivy Beatrice Cobbold*. England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007 [Internet]. 2007 [cited 2 May 2022];10, 2652. Available from: https://search.ancestry.ca/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=7579&h=6812505&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=8912