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Recapture of escaped lion at Monaghan Railway
Station on the 15th April, 1948.

Person involved: Mr. Con Keogh, Customs and Excise, Monaghan,
Preventive Officer.

Summary: At Monaghan Railway Station on the 15th April, 1948, a full grown lion walked on to the platform from its cage in a railway waggon, which had been left unbolted. Mr. Keogh arrived on the platform at this stage and tried - unsuccessfully - to prevent it getting outside the station premises by getting in front of the lion and waving his cap.

The lion got on to the roadway and crossed into a field. On Mr. Keogh's instructions the cage was brought to the field. A large crowd had gathered, including two members of the Variety Show's staff who, however, took little part in the affair. Mr. Keogh eventually succeeded by continuing to wave his cap, in coaxing the lion back to the cage.

The Gardaí state that the animal showed no vicious tendencies while at large and they cannot say whether human life was endangered by it. They do not consider that Mr. Keogh's act comes within the scope of the statutory definition of a deed of bravery: "an effort to save human life involving personal risk". The original letter reporting this occurrence to the Comhairle suggests that Mr. Keogh coaxed the lion back into the cage to save the life of the lion who would otherwise have been shot. Later representations, however, claim that the lives of the spectators were in danger.

The matter of recognition of Mr. Keogh's action was raised in the following letter from Mr. Ó Cinnsealaigh, Secretary of the Monaghan branch of the Customs and Excise Preventive Staff Association:-

"I wonder if you could supply the following information to me. I am at a complete loss to know which office I should write to and this is the only reason that I am taking up your time. Perhaps it might even hold some interest for you.

The page which I enclose here is taken from "The Customs Journal." (this was returned to the writer). It is an account which also appeared in several daily newspapers. Although treated in a humorous manner it had the most serious effect. Many of the people who witnessed the incident will vouch to the courage of Mr. Keogh. He alone out of the crowd of men who were on the platform at the time dared to boat the lion back into his cage. One of the reasons which activated his action was that if the lion remained at large it would have to be shot. There are several people here who could verify Mr. Keogh's great love of all animals, even to the point of endangering his own life to preserve that of this lion. This must seem a little over-dramatic. Believe me, it is not in the least.

Perhaps you could forward to me any address to which I might write re the award of a testimonial of courage to Mr. Keogh".

With the concurrence of the Chairman, Mr. Ó Cinnsealaigh was informed that Mr. Keogh's act did not come within the scope of the statutory definition of a deed of bravery and that the Comhairle could not, therefore, make an award to him. The following is a translation of his reply, dated 1st November, 1948:-

"I am obliged for your letter of the 21st ultimo, which I have placed before a meeting of the Association.

The meeting was of opinion that this case comes within the definition "an effort to save human life involving personal risk". There was undoubtedly personal risk. This leaves only the first requirement. Although it was not an attempt to save a particular person's life, Mr. Keogh attempted to recapture the lion and in that way he saved, perhaps, the lives of more than one person. A large crowd of people including men, women and children were present at the time.

I trust you will be able to reply favourably soon."

Having regard to these representations the Gardaí were asked for a report of the facts.

Report of Superintendent, Monaghan (17/11/48):

On the 15th April, 1948. a full grown lion arrived at Monaghan Railway Station from Belfast consigned to Mr. Edgar Benyon, owner of a travelling variety show known as "Bam-Boo-Zalem" which was then in Monaghan Town. The lion was enclosed in a large wooden cage at the end of which was a drop or sliding door which was fastened by a push bolt and lock the key of which was tied in a loop beside the lock. The cage was in a separate wagon which was also locked on arrival at the Railway Station.

Shortly after the arrival of the train at Monaghan, Mr. John Kennedy, Customs Officer, and Mr. James Nolan, Chief Clerk at the Railway, went to the wagon in which the lion was consigned for Customs purposes. They opened the door of the wagon and having some doubts as to the Regulations governing the importation of the lion they returned to the Customs Office to look up the Regulations leaving the door of the wagon open. On returning to the wagon they found that the lion had its head out under the door of its cage. They tried to force the door down but the lion pushed forward and got out of the cage and on to the platform. At this stage Mr. Con Keogh, Customs Preventive Officer, arrived on the platform and on seeing the lion he immediately got in front of it and tried by waving his cap to prevent it from getting out of the Station premises. The lion, however, walked on towards the exit with Mr. Keogh still backing in front of it and waving his cap at it. He was unable to prevent it from getting outside the Station premises.

The lion got on to the roadway and crossed into a field between the Railway Station and the Garda Station. At this time a large crowd had gathered and Mr. Keogh ordered some of the Great Northern Railway Staff to bring the lion's cage to the field and this was done. The cage was placed at the gate leading from the field and convenient to the Railway premises. By this time two members of Edgar Benyon's Staff had arrived on the scene, but, apart from giving instructions to persons in the vicinity, they took little part in getting the lion back into the cage. Mr. Keogh then entered the field and kept waving his cap at the lion until he eventually succeeded in coaxing it back into the cage. Other persons entered the field but apart from standing around on the outskirts they took no active part.

While it is not definitely known if the animal was vicious it showed no such tendencies while at large and we are not in a position to say if human life was in danger from it.

Undoubtedly Mr. Keogh displayed great courage and his action is highly commendable, but it does not appear to come within the definition of a Deed of Bravery as given in the Deeds of Bravery Act, 1947, and for that reason the matter was not reported at the time."

/Comment

3.

Comment of Chief Superintendent:

"The action taken in the matter could hardly be classified as
"an effort to save human life involving personal risk".