



# William Alford Lloyd, the Aquarist, and His Cat, Mim

By Lee Finley

## UPFRONT

William Alford Lloyd is one of the greats of 19th Century aquarists – in many ways possibly the greatest of them all. It feels a bit strange doing a piece where his name is first in the title while the article that follows is more about his cat. Granted, a great amount of it is based on Lloyd's writings, but it is still about a cat. For Lloyd, his cat Mim, for nearly two decades was more than just a family pet. In the early stages of preparing this little article I had made mention of it to Emiliano Spada, who last November had a wonderful article on Lloyd and his previously unpublished communications with Anton Dohrn of the Naples Aquarium. In a few of the letters from Lloyd to Dohrn there was at least a line or two regarding the status of Mim in the Lloyd household and these showed the love of the cat that Lloyd had. After our communication Emiliano sent me a scan of a postcard that Lloyd had sent to Dohrn and that was not used in the article. It was a revelation on the topic. Lloyd ended the short message with the following: "my family – one wife, one daughter, one cat." Yes, those of us who are of a cat orientation know that there are some cats that are pets. But equally, some cats can and do become family. Weirdish, maybe...but true. With that off my chest I present to you...



Mim, the Cat. This is from Harrison Weir's 1889 book "Our Cats and All About Them. Their Varieties, Habits, and Management; and For Show, the Standard of Excellence and Beauty; Described and Pictured.". Author's collection.

## MIM

Mim, during her life and a bit beyond, was considered by William Alford Lloyd and most others, as an Angora cat. Later, in Harrison Weir's influential 1889 book on cats, she was stated to be a Persian cat. Basically, she was a long-haired solid black cat. This was the general class description for cat shows at the Crystal Palace in which Mim was entered. Herein, and for historical correctness, she is generally considered in the placement which Lloyd used unless stated otherwise.

Mim led an exciting and well-travelled life for a cat. She was born in Paris France on April 7, 1860. Her "kittenhood" [Lloyd's term] was spent in a hotel and she was a particular favorite who was well known for going begging from table to table.

On November 18th 1861 Mim arrived in London in a large fish-can (how fitting) and when released from this carrier she was obviously not amused. But she adjusted well to her new life and quickly learned to run to the front door when the "cat's meat man" came by in the morning peddling his daily supply of horse flesh.

In December of 1862 Mim travelled to Hamburg Germany as a part of the Lloyd family when a position to become the keeper of aquarium at the Zoological Gardens there was accepted by William. He also did some work for an aquarium in Paris, but apparently this did not involve moving Mim around. She lived well in Hamburg although she did miss the cat's meat peddler as this practice was not done in Germany. Early morning door to door honey peddlers were about in her new city and she often ran to the door when they came by. Old habits die hard.

While in Germany Mim shared the Lloyd household with another pet. This was a canary named Dick and it (again in Lloyd's words) "...did not relish Mim's society...". The bird would make enough noise that either Lloyd's wife or his daughter would have to come and remove Mim from the room (which was the warmest in the house). For this Mim really hated Dick. During the Hamburg period of her life Mim had two kittens and these were taught by her to "...tease the bird in her absence..." and Dick regularly made a wild commotion at these times.

Mim was one of those cats who loved to have her head patted and scratched. But...human hands that touched her back beyond her shoulders were likely to be treated in an unkind manner. Lloyd noted that even he harbored some scars that resulted from what Mim considered inappropriate touching!

In November of 1870 Lloyd and the family returned to England [Note: For more on this see the "Serendipity" sidebar]. Initially Lloyd was noted to be taking the position of Aquarist at the then under development Brighton Aquarium. This did not work out and Lloyd went on to develop and manage the marine aquarium for the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, London.

## Sidebar

### Serendipity

One of my favorite websites is <https://www.parlouraquariums.org.uk/> and if you haven't been there, I highly recommend that you check it out as it is a treasure trove of materials relating to 19th Century U.K. aquarium history. The author of the site is Bob Alexander. Bob passed away in 2018 but the site, as he left it, has been maintained in his honor. His section on Lloyd is particularly helpful for anyone interested in this master aquarist. A good amount of the material on Lloyd is fragmentary in its presentation, but it offers a great introduction and will aim interested parties down numerous potentially productive paths.

In one section on Lloyd, Alexander notes the following: "I cannot discover the date Lloyd left Hamburg to return to London...". As it happens, serendipitously, in Lloyd's 1873 article used as a reference in this piece on Mim, he states the following: "On the 10th of November 1870, she [Mim] returned to England with me...". A blank is filled in.

Many different things were constantly ongoing at the Crystal Palace. In the middle of 1871, there was an event, and it was the beginning of a trend that would help to make Mim a "a star" for several years (with Lloyd's help, of course). This was the Cat Show. The July 1871 show was in some circles said to be the first of its kind. Well, it really wasn't the first such show...close but no cigar. But it was big and garnered a major amount of attention. Depending on the source, the number of people attending the first show was stated to be somewhere between 19,000 to 20,000!

Due to the great success of what was initially billed as the first "annual" show the feature became a more regular event with five cat shows put on between July 1871 and September 1873. Mim, in her class, was always among the winners. She never took a first-place prize but was consistently the second or third place winner. See the sidebar for Mim's showings over the years. Her biggest "star" year was at the fifth show in September 1873. There was prepared a brief written piece on her that was made available around the show and directed people to her (it was unsigned, but there is no doubt in my mind who was responsible – Mr. Lloyd, of course). Below is the text of this piece. This was picked up and used in coverage of the show in several newspapers, including at least one reprint in a paper in the U.S. There was also a full-sized photograph of her that was prominently displayed (for a bit more on this see the Obituary further down). Below is the text of this piece.

*"Born in Paris, April 7, 1860; came to London, November 18, 1861. Travelled thence to Hamburg, and is now finally settled down in Lower Norwood. Her life-size portrait is published at her own expense, out of the money she has gained in prizes, and she has been thought worthy of two eulogistic stanzas by Frederick Lockyer. N.B. – The visitor to inquire for 'Mim.'"*



A group of prize winning cats from the 1873 Crystal Palace show drawn by Harrison Weir. Mim is seen in the lower left hand corner. This appeared in the December 1, 1873 issue of "The Animal World." Author's collection.



“Detail of Mim from the above illustration”. Author’s collection.

## Sidebar

### **Mim’s prizes at the Crystal Palace Cat Shows (1871 – 1873).**

First Cat Show, July 13, 1871. Long-Haired Coloured [non-white] Female Class. Third Prize. Shown by Mr. Lloyd.

Second Cat Show, December 2, 1871. Long-Haired Black Class. Second Prize. Shown by Miss Lloyd. (Note: For this show Mim was entered under the name of Lloyd’s daughter, Martha Amelia, who was 20 years old at the time. The designated entry name hereafter is Miss M.A. Lloyd).

Third Cat Show, May 15 – 16, 1872. Long-Haired Females – Black Class. Second Prize. Miss M.A. Lloyd.

Fourth Cat Show, October 26 – 29, 1872. Long-Haired Females - Black Class. Third Prize. Miss M.A. Lloyd.

Fifth Cat Show, September 20, 1873. Entirely Black Class. Second Prize. Miss M.A. Lloyd.

Lloyd in 1873, with his poetic likes showing, noted that the English poet Frederick Locker, in his poem “The Angora Cat” had two stanzas that well described Mim and her behavior. The poem consists of nine stanzas, and it underwent various changes after its first publication in the 1862 book “London Lyrics.” These generally consisted of changes to certain words and punctuation. For example, in stanza number five of the original presentation up to the 1884 edition the phrase “...Your feathery tail.” is seen. But, in 1885 Locker changed the first word to “...Thy...”. But more importantly in 1874 Locker changed the name of the poem to “LouLou And Her Cat.” I have seen no Lloyd mentions of this after his 1873 note regarding the poem. I think that he probably would have remained happy with the stanzas as they were at the time. What follows are stanza numbers three and five from the 1870 version which Lloyd felt to be so diagnostic of Mim.

*Long hair, soft as satin,  
A musical purr---  
'Gainst the window she'd flatten  
Her delicate fur.*

*What whiskers! She's purring  
All over. Regale  
Our eyes, puss, by stirring,  
Your feathery tail!*

Harrison Weir, on a discussion of Mim in his 1889 book, did make a mistake on Lloyd's first name in designating him as "Edward". It is clear that he is discussing "our" Lloyd in that it is stated that he is "...the great authority on all matters relating to aquariums [page 25]." Weir obviously and mistakenly used the name Edward Lloyd, a popular and widely acclaimed British tenor, who among many venues also appeared at the Crystal Palace. His public singing debuted there when he was just 14 years old.

Hoping to not be overly critical I must also note that Weir referred to Mim as "Mimie". I have seen no record of Lloyd using that name for his beloved cat. But he and his family, like many of us cat fans, did develop the use of nicknames for Mim. Two of these mentioned by Lloyd are "Old Fool" and "The Darling".

In modern times the incorrect name Mimie has been used in one source that I am aware of. This is in The History Project section of the website of The Cat Fanciers Association The History Project: Gallery: Persian/Angora/Longhair: Black (cat-o-pedia.org). (Last viewed 12/31/2023). This is also based on the work of Weir noted above.

On June 28th, 1879, Mim passed away. There is a well written obituary which initially appeared in "The Animal World" [R.S.P.C.A.] (Date currently uncertain) and this was reprinted in several publications including several newspapers and magazines. "Hardwicke's Science Gossip" was one of the magazines and what is below is taken from the January 1880 issue (page 22), a copy of which is in my personal library.

*"Mr. Lloyd's Cat. – Died suddenly on June 28th, 1879, Mim, the dearly-beloved black Angora cat belonging to Mr. W.A. Lloyd, of the Crystal Palace Aquarium. She was in her twentieth year, and she spent a greater part of her long and blameless life in London, Paris, Hamburg, and Sydenham, reclining on her master's study table, watching him writing about Aquaria, and experimenting on water, and plants, and animals until at length she became as well acquainted with such matters as he is. Only, she could not write about them, and so she went to sleep on the table instead. She was the only known pussy who ever had an account of her own in a Post-Office Saving Bank, where she accumulated the sum of five guineas, which she earned in prizes for her beauty and other good qualities at various cat shows, and this money she spent in a full-sized photograph of herself, taken by Norris, and framed and glazed."*

In just slightly over a year, Lloyd at age 56, joined Mim in eternal rest. John Colam, Editor of “The Animal World”, in a belated obituary for Lloyd, made note of Mim and how she followed Lloyd around like a dog. He also wrote of a late in life letter from Lloyd in which it was stated that he was going to send in to the magazine (at no charge) an article on the life of his “...poor dear old cat “Mim” whom I sadly miss...”. Unfortunately, the article never got written.

Sometimes, as an author, coming up with just the “right” title for an article can be a trying situation. I was torn on this piece, with another possible title being “The Cat, Mim, and William Alford Lloyd, Her Aquarist.” I went with what is in place above...hopefully it is the “right” way to go.



A Midjourney AI created illustration of Lloyd writing at his desk with Mim looking on.”



“William Alford Lloyd - The Aquarist. From MOAPH’s library.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks very much to the following parties for their assistance with this article: Gary Bagnall (MOAPH), Emiliano Spada, Phil Browning (R.S.P.C.A.), Mary Sears (Ernst Mayr Library M.C.Z) and as always, my wife Aline.

## References

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Lloyd, W.A. 1873. Untitled piece on Mim pages 179-180. In: Anon. 1873. Cat show at the Crystal Palace. "The Animal World", Volume 4: page 179. The Lloyd piece is headed with a reference to a picture of Mim on page 181. Although the main article is listed here without an author, it is no doubt written by John Colam, the Editor of the magazine.

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