

Harrison Weir and the Old Lady

Harrison Weir's connection with the National goes back to the founding of the National Cat Club in 1887. A life-long cat lover, he created the very first cat show at the Crystal Palace in 1871, with the aim of showing cats as beautiful and valuable animals and improving their treatment.

The Victorians were great exhibitors, whether it was orchids, chickens or brassware, and Weir had long been involved in breeding and showing rabbits. By writing the rules and making up the classes for his shows, he also invented the pedigree cat. Before Harrison Weir and his cat show, cats had been big ones, black ones, stripy ones or fat ones, but the idea that they could be valuable specimens had never occurred. In the years after the Crystal Palace show, cat mania swept Victorian Britain, with cats on everything from cards to calendars. When Queen Victoria acquired two blue Persians "of the finest pedigree breeding", the cat had really arrived.

One of the stars of the first show was The Old Lady, Weir's own blue tabby, then fourteen years old; a large classic tabby shorthair and his special pet. She was still a fine figure of a puss in her velvet collar and silver bell and won a best in show award. Surprisingly, two of the three show



*With all good wishes,
Yours Truly
Harrison Weir
1889*

judges were Harrison Weir and his brother, John! Weir obviously had a very special affection for this cat for, after she died, he always wore her silver bell on his watch chain. (You can't enter cats now if you are judging, and it's considered very bad form to show your own cat under a judge who has bred it.)



"The
Old Lady"