

**Pigeon Geographies:
Aesthetics, Organisation, and
Athleticism in British Pigeon
Fancying,
c.1850-1939**

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Abstract

This thesis provides new ways of thinking about human-bird encounters under domestication, providing the first substantive geographical study of ‘pigeon geographies’. It explores the spaces, practices, and human-pigeon relationships involved in pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing in Britain, from the mid-nineteenth century up until World War Two. The growth of fancy pigeon exhibitions was part of a wider Victorian passion for domesticating animals, at a time when *human* bodies were also subject to increasing aesthetic and moral scrutiny. Long-distance pigeon racing emerged at the end of this period, organised competitive sport more generally seen as an important means of moral improvement and identity expression. Like many other competitive pastimes in the second half of the nineteenth century, then, institutional bodies were formed to manage the expansion of showing and long-distance racing. The Pigeon Club and the Marking Conference were formed in 1885 to oversee British pigeon exhibitions, whilst the National Homing Union, formed in 1896, governed British long-distance pigeon racing. Both pastimes facilitated the formation of social worlds around varieties of domestic pigeon (*Columba livia*) and their respective practices. Whilst these pastimes historically had strong concentrations of male working-class followers – particularly in the north-west and north-east – they were both widespread throughout Britain and spanned all socio-economic classes, although accounts of female fanciers were rare.

Through the exhibition of pigeons, fanciers debated and defined aesthetics, formulating breeding standards for each fancy breed, and questioning the ways in which pigeons were manipulated – sometimes contentiously – to produce the ‘ideal’. Long-distance pigeon racers, on the other hand, sought to understand and hone their birds’ athletic abilities, becoming entangled in scientific debate about homing, as well as geographical questions about the conduct and regulation of their sport. Racers were also drawn into *aesthetic* debates, exhibiting their racing birds during the off-season, the show pen becoming a fascinating frontier between showing and racing. Through the organisation of the spaces and practices that made up the fabric of these pastimes, pigeon showing and long-distance racing reconfigured both humans and their birds, the two becoming closely intertwined through collaborative encounters.

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Chapter 1 Aesthetics, Organisation, and Athleticism: Introduction

From urban pest to war hero, feathered athlete to beautiful show specimen, human-pigeon relationships span a diverse spectrum, Blechman (2006:3) arguing that “no animal...has developed as unique and continuous a relationship with humans”. Most of us, on a daily basis, encounter and interact with pigeons in everyday spaces, but this thesis investigates two social worlds in which human-pigeon dynamics were very different. In these social worlds, pigeons were domesticated, bred, cared for, traded, and prepared for exhibition or for long-distance racing. There is, Allen (2009:11) argues, “something special about the relationship” between pigeon fanciers and their birds, and, with this in mind, this thesis seeks to unravel the geographies behind these human-pigeon encounters. The research topic is an extension of my Masters dissertation – a study of modern-day pigeon fancying – during which the rich under-explored histories of pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing were revealed. Domestic pigeons were chosen as an interesting example through which human-animal dynamics could be explored, adding to an emerging ‘avian geography’ literature. I am not a pigeon fancier, nor, I must admit, was I previously aware of the scale of pigeon fancying either today or in the past. Nonetheless, the research process has revealed fascinatingly complex – and relatively unknown – worlds, and it is hoped that readers too will be captivated by their intricacies.

The term ‘pigeon fancying’ describes the practice and culture of breeding and caring for domestic pigeons, either preparing them for exhibition or training them to race. It is used to describe these different animal pastimes both individually and jointly and, thus, the term ‘fancier’ can refer to all pigeon-keepers collectively or to those belonging to just one branch of the pigeon Fancy (most commonly, but not exclusively, the exhibitors). Showing and racing involved different practices, motivations, and, perhaps most importantly, different breeds of domestic pigeon (*Columba livia*). Both pastimes were widespread throughout Britain and, like other competitive pastimes in the second half of the nineteenth century, their expansion necessitated the formation of institutional bodies to govern and formally organise them on a national scale. The exhibition of fancy pigeons in Britain was originally governed by the Pigeon

Club and the Marking Conference, both formed in 1885. British long-distance pigeon racing was governed by the National Homing Union, formed in 1896.

This thesis begins in the mid-nineteenth century, a time when pigeon fancying, still not formally organised, was spreading its wings across Victorian Britain. With the continued growth of the railways and rapid industrial and economic growth, recreation and leisure became important facets of Victorian life (Culpin, 1987). Human-animal relationships at this time were, Cowie (2014:8) contends, “schizophrenic”, animals simultaneously loved and cared for, displayed and objectified, and abused and mistreated (see Chapter 2). With increasing sympathy and growing compassion for animals and their rights, the treatment of animals during the Victorian period, according to Cowie (2014:9), became “used as a barometer for moral progress and civilisation in an era that put increasing stress on personal restraint and respectability”.

By the 1850s, a craze for breeding and improving pigeons, poultry, and other birds had swept across Britain (Secord, 1981; Feeley-Harnik, 2004). Of particular public interest at this time were chickens, the passion for valuable and exotic breeds popularly labelled ‘fowl mania’ or ‘hen fever’ (Secord, 1981; Feeley-Harnik, 2004; Lawler, 2014). It was in this context that Charles Darwin, in the mid-1850s, took a keen interest in fancy pigeons (see Chapter 5) and the public pigeon Fancy gained impetus. As a result, Darwin was advised by his publisher – and by his illustrious friends William Yarrell and Charles Lyell – to publish *The Origin of Species* as a smaller work solely on pigeons (Feeley-Harnik, 2004; Nicholls, 2009). Whilst ‘The Origin of Pigeons’ – perhaps sadly – never became a reality, Darwin’s experiments with pigeons were crucial to his theories, and his work enabled pigeon fanciers to engage with debates about heredity and instinct at a time when their rapidly advancing pastimes required them to develop a better understanding of their avian counterparts (see Chapters 5 and 7). The first fancy pigeon show open to members of the public was held in 1848, soon followed by the first open competitive pigeon show in 1850, and stimulated the growth of pigeon exhibiting alongside a Victorian fancy for many other domestic animals. This was a period when the *human* body was also being subjected to aesthetic scrutiny, rapidly changing fashions showing the sometimes extreme malleability of the human body. At this time, ‘beauty’, ‘aesthetics’, and ‘taste’ became crucial moral, social, and political questions, prominent art critic John

Ruskin promoting his belief in an affinity between ‘beauty’, ‘truth’, and ‘Nature’ (see Chapter 5). It is within this context that the Victorian exhibition of fancy animals is situated.

This era also saw the increased importance of friendly and competitive sport as a form of moral and physical improvement, as well as both the control and expression of identities (Johnes, 2010). It was during this time that many sports such as football and rugby became formally organised, facilitated by the growing railway network and expanding middle classes (Johnes, 2010). The Victorian desire for a civilised and controlled society was manifest in the rules, regulations, and discipline associated with sports (Johnes, 2010). Pigeon racing had existed as a sport in Britain since the late-eighteenth century, but its long-distance form was closely linked to the development of the railway network in the nineteenth century facilitating longer – and larger – races (Ditcher, 1991; Hansell, 1998; Johnes, 2007; Allen, 2009; Baker, 2013). In the 1850s, the importation of Belgian racing pigeons kick-started British racing (see Chapter 5) and, with the introduction of telegraphy for commercial uses that same decade, redundant messenger pigeons were enrolled in the sport, giving British long-distance racing its impetus. The first long-distance race flown from Britain was in conjunction with the 1871 Belgian National Concours and, by the 1880s, British clubs were experimenting with cross-Channel races. Pigeon racers seeking to breed and train birds with extraordinary flying abilities did so at a time when humans themselves were mastering flight (see Chapter 2). “Men have always built their castles in the air and dreamed of the ‘impossible’”, Sealy (1996:19) writes, “whether it be the reason for their existence...the quest for riches, or the desire to fly like the birds”. The turn of the twentieth century saw the first powered, controlled flights and, by World War One, aeroplanes capable of carrying passengers were in use (Hudson, 1972; Culpin, 1987; Sealy, 1996). This was the beginning of an ‘Era of Air’, pigeon fanciers demonstrating an aerial imagination which paralleled the emerging aeronautical imagination.

The two main sources used in this research – *The Feathered World* (est. 1889) and *The Racing Pigeon* (est. 1898) – were established towards the end of the Victorian era, around the same time as the two pastimes became formally organised and governing bodies were being formed. The majority of analysis, then, is concentrated from the 1890s onwards, discussion of the earlier decades

based on early books and retrospective articles. It is, nonetheless, important to consider this earlier period and background to the Fancy, in order to show how pigeon exhibiting and long-distance racing developed into pastimes that required and could support a formal press.

The year 1939 was chosen as the stopping point of this thesis, most obviously because of the outbreak of World War Two and its necessary restrictions (see Chapters 4 and 6 for discussion of World War One). This marked a clear division in the ways in which fanciers engaged with their birds, the majority of racing pigeons being enlisted as military messengers. There is, perhaps more importantly, great value in this thesis covering the *interwar* period, due to the changing economic and social landscape of Britain (Culpin, 1987), the effects of which were felt by the Fancy. Interwar depression, economic stagnation, and unemployment in heavy industries caused a gradual decline of working-class life, whilst changes in leisure – such as the growth of cinemas – saw pigeon fancying competing for followers (Mass Observation, 1943; Mott, 1973; Johnes, 2007). Furthermore, migration out of towns and slum clearances – replaced by council houses with strict tenancy agreements – contributed to a decline in pigeon fancying which has, fanciers contend, continued to the present day (Mass Observation, 1943; Mott, 1973; Johnes, 2007).

This thesis is a study of historical animal geography, or, more specifically, avian geography. It seeks to understand past human-pigeon interaction and the human structures that governed it. It does not attempt to map out a comprehensive distribution and diffusion of the pastimes, as there are no surviving records that would permit this. Instead, a geographical approach has been taken to understand the past practices and values of fanciers, the resultant human-pigeon encounters, and the processes by which pigeons and their fanciers became intertwined. Whilst some existing studies have investigated the history of British pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing, they have tended to have a socio-economic focus. Ethnographic studies of modern pigeon fancying, whilst limited in number, have taken a similar approach, showing how these pastimes can offer insights into different cultures and human identity formation. This thesis develops existing literature and provides the first substantive geographical study of human-pigeon relationships. Contributing to an emerging ‘avian geography’, it demonstrates how, through taking pigeons’ bodies and abilities

seriously, we can understand a lot about the human practices, beliefs, dispositions, and politics that (re)framed and (re)made pigeons. Unlike other work in animal geography, then, the pigeons in this study take centre stage (or, in some instances, cage!).

The aims of this thesis are three-fold: to reveal some of the lesser-known practices involved in pigeon showing and long-distance racing in order to understand the organisation of these pastimes; to explore the ways in which fancy pigeon aesthetics and racing pigeon athleticism were physically and metaphorically (re)defined and (re)produced; and to examine the human-pigeon entanglements produced by the pastimes.

Following a review of relevant literature (Chapter 2), and discussion of the research methods (Chapter 3), this thesis covers pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing separately, although links are drawn between the two. Chapter 4 examines the human organisations and structures that regulated pigeon exhibitions, and frames the showroom as a space of encounter, gaze, performance, and display. Chapter 5 considers the ways in which pigeon fanciers (re)defined, (re)created, and represented fancy pigeon aesthetics, with significant emphasis on the birds themselves. Chapter 6 turns to long-distance pigeon racing, exploring its organisation and governance, the people and institutions behind its control, and the meticulous attention to logistical detail as racers struggled to delineate space and time. Chapter 7, again shifting focus onto the birds, discusses the ways in which pigeon athleticism was understood, (re)defined, (re)produced, and depicted, including debates about how to hone their mysterious homing ability. There were also interesting – and, perhaps, unexpected – aesthetic elements to pigeon racing, which bring this thesis full-circle to consider the contested – and constructed – nature of domestic pigeons. More than simply aesthetic and athletic contests between birds, these two pigeon pastimes were also drawn into ontological contests between different definitions of ‘beauty’, of ‘athleticism’, and of the birds, people, and practices involved. This thesis concludes (Chapter 8) by summarising the wider implications of this research to animal geography and historical geography, explaining some of the links between showing and long-distance racing, and what it means to write the geography of ‘the Fancy’. It argues that, through the regulation of pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing, people and pigeons were drawn together

through inter-species interaction, forging complex relationships that contribute to research that challenges our understanding of human-avian dynamics under domestication.

Chapter 2 Placing Pigeons: Literature

Review

Buller (2014a; 2014b) and Hovorka (2017a; 2017b), in their recent reviews in *Progress in Human Geography* of the growing animal geography literature, praise the subdiscipline as porous and shifting, a diverse collection of ideas, practices, and methodologies with strong historical foundations. Geographers' accounts that trace the history and development of animal geography (see Philo, 1995; Wolch et al., 2003; Urbanik, 2012; Buller, 2014a; Howell, 2015; Hovorka, 2017b) identify three recognised stages in the subdiscipline's development, which Julie Urbanik (2012) terms 'waves'. The first wave of animal geography, Urbanik (2012) explains, began with the institutionalisation of academic geography in the late-nineteenth century, at a time when a key part of the discipline was the study of the geographical distribution of fauna and flora. Termed 'zoögeography', it continued to be important into the early-twentieth century, an important contribution to which was the work of Marion Newbigin. In 1913, Newbigin published *Animal Geography* – a methodological catalogue of the fauna of the main biomes of the world – arguing that animal geographers should focus more on animal adaptations to environments, rather than their relationships with other species. This links to Urbanik's (2012) second 'wave' of animal geography, which emerged in the mid-twentieth century, geographers taking increasing interest in human-livestock relationships, domestication, and human impacts on wild animals. One of the most important figures during this period was Carl Sauer (1925; 1952a; 1952b), who sought to demonstrate the ways in which humans transformed the natural landscape, culture working on – and with – nature. In his 1952 book *Spades, Hearths and Herds*, for instance, Sauer explored the ways in which animal domestication created cultural landscapes through practices such as grazing. "This new cultural ecology approach", Urbanik (2012:33) states, was "helpful in introducing the idea that human culture has a huge role to pay in terms of human-animal relations".

The third 'wave' of animal geography emerged in the mid-1990s, born out of geography's 'cultural turn', and has been termed 'new' animal geography (Philo, 1995; Wolch et al. 2003). As a result, there has since been a proliferation of geographical studies exploring material and metaphorical 'placings' of animals

and human-animal relationships in shared spaces (Wolch and Emel, 1995; Wolch and Emel, 1998a; Philo and Wilbert, 2000). Animal geographers and other social scientists have sought to answer questions such as ‘why look at animals?’ (Berger, 1980) and ‘what is an animal?’ (Ingold, 1988), investigating spatialised and temporal human-animal interactions and “drawing nonhuman animal life in from the margins of scholarship” (Johnson, 2015:297). Going “beyond taking animals as merely ‘signifiers’ of human endeavour and meaning” (Buller, 2014a:308), animal geographers have explored what Philo and Wolch (1998:10) term “the complex nexus of spatial relations between people and animals”, critically challenging hegemony and dichotomy (Wolch and Emel, 1995; Wolch and Emel, 1998a; Wolch and Emel, 1998b; Emel et al. 2002).

As Buller (2014) describes, since the turn of the twenty-first century, the ‘animal turn’ has continued and literature has boomed, focus shifting from studies of animals as metaphoric or conceptual devices – ‘texts’ (Geertz, 1972), ‘windows’ (Mulling, 1999), or ‘looking-glasses’ (Angelo and Jerolmack, 2012) – to more intimate and intertwined encounters and shared subjectivities with animals. Alice Hovorka’s (2017b) most recent review article identifies a current fourth ‘wave’ in animal geographies, an emerging conceptual and methodological hybridity facilitating interdisciplinary research and affective engagement with animal experiences, agency, and subjectivity. Animal geographies, therefore, are pushing the boundaries of what is understood to be ‘human’ and ‘animal’, recognising that humans and animals are “created not in isolation but in relation to other living beings and inanimate things” (Urbanik, 2012:31). As Pitt (2015:48) explains, “human life can only be understood as closely entangled with that of nonhumans”.

This literature review will explore examples of these human-animal entanglements, reviewing work in animal geography relevant to the key themes of this thesis. It will consider the broader literature on human-animal encounters, including the spatial categorisation of animals, animal breeding and husbandry, the display of animal bodies, and animals in sport. It then identifies an emerging ‘avian geographies’, examining recent geographical work on birds, and explores literature that focuses specifically on human-pigeon dynamics.

2.1 Finding animals a 'place'

As Philo and Wilbert's (2000) *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places* explores, humans classify and categorise animals according to their uses and perceived 'value' – what sociologist Colin Jerolmack (2013:230) refers to as “‘sociozoologic’ classificatory systems” – creating an imaginative geography of animals that mediates our interactions and relationships with them. Indeed, as Ingold (1988:10) has identified, the concept of ‘animal’ is culturally variable, socially defined, and historically contingent, what he calls “the human construction of animality”. As a result, animals have been placed in imaginary and physical spaces, their ‘place’ constantly shifting with human attitudes towards them. As Howell (2015) explains, ‘exclusion’, ‘marginalisation’, and ‘enclosure’ have become some of the most prominent geographical themes explored by animal geographers. Animals are, Philo (1995:655) contends, “subjected to all manner of sociospatial inclusions and exclusions”, our relationships with them dictated by what Jerolmack (2013:226) terms “spatial logic”. Pigeons are no exception. The pigeons in this thesis were domesticated and ‘included’ by humans, but, on the other hand, urban pigeons – and, indeed, wood pigeons (*Columba palumbus*) – have, at times, had quite tumultuous relationships with members of the public, health officials, and local authorities (Nicholson, 1951; Gompertz, 1957; Hockenyos, 1962; Ordish and Binder, 1967; Krebs, 1974; Simms, 1979; Couzens, 2004). The pigeons found in city streets, however, are, in fact, the same species as their domestic counterparts (*Columba livia*), and belong to the same taxonomic family (*Columbidae*) as doves, thus illustrating how human-animal relationships are often spatially situated and relative.

2.1.1 Animals ‘out of place’

Drawing on Cresswell's (1996) study of how human behaviour may be labelled ‘in’ or ‘out of place’, geographers have identified the ways in which humans have categorised animals – and their behaviours – by designating hierarchical human and non-human spaces (Wolch, 1998; Wolch and Emel, 1998a; Philo and Wilbert, 2000; Wolch, 2002). Space can, nonetheless, be transgressed, either physically or behaviourally, people – and animals – previously ‘in place’ becoming ‘out of place’ (Philo, 1995; Cresswell, 1996). Animals may become ‘out of place’, for instance, when their use of space conflicts with human uses, tension arising due to conflicting behavioural norms and spatial routines. This has been most

commonly studied in urban areas, examples including rats (Dyl, 2006; Atkins, 2012), foxes (Atkins, 2012), feral cats (Griffiths et al., 2000), dogs (Philo, 1995; Howell, 2000), and birds (Campbell, 2007; Hovorka, 2008). Animals, Philo (1995:656) explains, have a habit of “wriggling out” of their designated spaces, inhabiting either human spaces or problematic “in-between-spaces” (Philo and Wilbert, 2000:21), such as alleys, sewers, and abandoned buildings. Urban pigeons, for instance, “habitually use the lofts of buildings, railway viaducts, the ledges of office blocks, the steeples and pediments of churches, the girders of bridges, public monuments and statues and similar places” for roosting (Simms, 1983:189).

Urban pigeons have, Humphries (2008:2) explains, largely been taken for granted, “identical gray blobs populating the planet...background scenery or extras in movies...invisible”. These birds have, however, also been treated with animosity as well as indifference. Allen (2009) claims that one of the earliest cultural references to hostility towards pigeons can be found in Tom Lehrer’s (1959) satirical song *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park*, in which he suggests feeding them cyanide-coated peanuts. The ‘rats with wings’ metaphor used today to describe the birds redefines both pigeons and space, serving to morally justify attempts to control them. Whilst the origin of this metaphor is not known, Blechman (2006) traces its earliest use to a 1980 Woody Allen film, *Stardust Memories*, in which two of the main characters disagree over whether a pigeon is ‘pretty’ or a ‘killer’. Whatever its source, the appropriation of the ‘rats with wings’ metaphor mobilises antipathy towards pigeons as part of the collective public psyche, leading to their exclusion, what Blechman (2006:2) has labelled as “pigeon prejudice” and Escobar (2014:365) has termed “politics with pigeons”. Furthermore, the negative connotations of the term ‘feral’ – often used to describe unwelcome urban pigeons – have also helped to frame these birds as ‘pests’. Whether motivated by fear – officially termed ‘peristerophobia’ – or by concerns over the economic and health implications of their excrement, this demonization of urban pigeons is now commonplace amongst the public imagination, casting a shadow over their racing and fancy cousins.

The spatial – and biological – control of urban pigeon populations has resorted to, amongst other methods, poisons, traps, falcons, contraceptives, and roosting deterrents such as spikes, acid, or glue (Hockenyos, 1962; Krebs, 1974; Simms,

1979; Jerolmack, 2013). These human-pigeon dynamics are underpinned by spatialised conflict. Trafalgar Square, for instance, has been a battleground between animal rights groups, environmental agencies, and the local council since the 1960s, pigeons becoming complexly entangled in the political and cultural fabric of London's landscapes (Jerolmack, 2013; Escobar, 2014). The criminalisation of pigeon feeding in the Square by the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, in 2003, illustrates the notion of being 'out of place', the pigeons seen as an economic and health threat conflicting with the Square's reputation as a world-class civic space (Escobar, 2014). In contrast, however, some believe that the "historical association with flocks of feral pigeons is a defining feature" of some urban spaces (Jerolmack, 2013:44). From a geographical perspective, Escobar (2014:272) sees this struggle as "a literal and material act of space purification", thus illustrating the more-than-human geographies of place-making.

Conversely, urban animals can, some research shows, help to animate our spatial experiences. Campbell's (2007) study of avian ecology in Glasgow, for instance, illustrates how humans and birds co-habit urban spaces, adapting to each other's behaviour and shaping a synanthropic relationship. Humans, Campbell (2007:79) explains, "negotiate behaviour responses to bird participation in their life spaces" (Campbell, 2007:79). Urban pigeons, Jerolmack (2008; 2009b; 2013) has argued, are no different, our interactions with them being "a primary way in which these [urban] spaces become meaningful" (Jerolmack, 2013:45). Thus, through such shared spaces, humans and animals affect each other's lives. The remainder of this literature review will discuss other examples of human-animal encounters and entanglements, but in situations where animals are considered '*in place*'.

2.1.2 Domestication

As the introduction to this chapter revealed, domestication was a key concern of the 'second wave' of animal geography, Carl Sauer's (1925; 1952a; 1952b) studies of human-environment relations making important contributions to animal geography's early expansion. Sauer's work traced the origins and diffusions of cultural practices, such as domestication, and their impact on landscapes. In *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals*, for instance, Sauer (1952b) traces the development of agriculture, presenting hypotheses for the origin and

dispersal of domesticated animals and plants. Sauerian geographers have since examined the relationships between nature and culture, framing landscapes and environments as cultural products.

The domestication of animals is classified by Philo (1995:677) as an “inclusionary extreme”, an acceptance of animals into human spaces. Whilst the definition of ‘domestication’ is constantly being challenged and expanded, the term generally refers to the process of taming animals – or cultivating plants – for human uses. Domestication, it can be argued, both reinforces and distorts the perceived ‘abyss’ (Berger, 1980) between humans and animals. Acting as a civilising tool – for the control of both animals and people – domestication has, research argues, historically emphasised human dominion over, and separation from ‘others’ (Tuan, 1984; Ingold, 1994; Anderson, 1997; Cassidy, 2007). On the other hand, it has equally been argued that domestic animals pose a complex contradiction that blurs such a rigid distinction (Anderson, 1997; Panelli, 2010; McHugh, 2011). Domesticated animals can, for instance, become “living artifacts – hybrids of ‘culture’ and ‘nature’” (Anderson, 1997:465), through practices such as breeding and training. Moreover, studies of human-animal interactions have found domestication to be a collaborative process between humans and animals, thus redistributing influence, power, and responsibility in the relationship (Cassidy, 2007). Power (2012:371), therefore, argues that domestication “is not a finished or stable relation, but must be continuously negotiated”. This speaks explicitly to the issues raised in this thesis.

Howell (2015) emphasises that domestication is neither a one-time event nor a one-way process. As a result of domestication, both humans and animals may become complexly intertwined through living together in close proximity, what Hinchcliffe and Whatmore (2006) call ‘conviviality’ and Griffin (2012) terms ‘shared living’. More-than-human studies in geography have opened up interdisciplinary dialogue – with, amongst other disciplines, animal studies, anthropology, ethology, and sociology – in order to explore the ways in which humans and animals in close contact form intimate relationships, demonstrating attunement (Whatmore, 2000; Whatmore, 2006, Bear and Eden, 2011; Griffin, 2012). Haraway (2008) terms this ‘being with’ and Panelli (2010:82) has labelled it “the interconnected *becoming* of life”. Such work, Greenhough (2010:42) states, has focused “not on the way the world *is*, but on how the world is *coming to be*”

through human interaction with nonhumans. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) idea that humans can learn to 'think like' and 'become' animals, research has shown the potentially mutually-transformative nature of human-animal interaction (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 2008; Bear and Eden, 2011). However, a tendency to prioritise humans in these relationships has been identified, little evidence suggesting that such encounters constitute becoming for the animals as well (Despret, 2004; Cull, 2015). Furthermore, some studies have revealed much less 'comfortable' relationships resulting from cohabitation (Griffiths et al., 2000; Dyl, 2006; Ginn, 2014; McKiernan and Instone, 2016). Ginn's (2014:532) study of "the slimy choreography of slugs and humans", for instance, suggests that whilst human-slug cohabitation is collaborative, their close interaction serves to *detach* them – rather than bring them closer together – humans distancing themselves in a bid for pest control. It may be useful, then, for animal geographers to follow Johnson's (2015:310) calls for a focus on the spatiality and temporality of *encounters* – rather than the animals – in order to develop "a heightened sensitivity to how animal lives and bodies matter".

Literature on domesticated animals mainly examines working animals and pets, but that is not to suggest that these are mutually exclusive categories, nor that they are the only typologies of domestic animals. Likewise, it is important not to assume a rigid divide between 'domesticated' and 'wild' animals, many species – such as animals kept in captivity, animals given partial freedom (such as livestock, honey bees, or racing pigeons), or 'wild' animals accustomed to encounters with humans (such as urban pigeons, ducks, or squirrels) – residing in a liminal, partially-domesticated conceptual space. Indeed, Despret (2014:35) encourages research to move away from this dichotomous thinking, away from a "mere continuum between domesticated and wild". As Berger (1980) and Griffin (2012) explain, animals – and our paradoxical relationships with them – often transcend strict categorisation. The fancy pigeons and racing pigeons in this thesis, for instance, were perched on a classificatory edge between 'workers' and 'pets', whilst still retaining some of their 'wild' behaviours.

The use of animals as workers has historically been important in mediating our relationships with them, raising moral and ethical questions surrounding their exploitation and subordination (Hribal, 2003; Denenholz Morse and Danahay, 2007; Hribal, 2007; Ritvo, 2010; Griffin, 2012). Whilst today the definition of

‘working animal’ has been expanded to include animals bred for tasks such as drug-detection, emotional therapy, and home assistance, historically animals have been used for duties such as transport, labour, hunting, and producing food. Before major advances in agricultural technology, for instance, livestock were integral labourers – humans and farm animals working together – as well as ‘living capital’, their reproductive capacity exploited for the production of meat and milk to sell (Griffin, 2012). Griffin’s (2012) analysis of human-animal dynamics in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries reveals paradoxical relationships between farm labourers and livestock. These human-animal relationships demonstrated a level of proximity – emotional and physical – and intimacy that transcended companionship, Griffin (2012) explains, but, at the same time, the cultures of animal keeping involved cruel and violent acts such as castration, slaughter, and deliberate maiming. In many instances, farm animals were better valued – and treated – than the labourers employed to care for them (Griffin, 2012). Such human-animal dynamics, research has shown, mirror societal relations, reflecting the ways in which *human* labourers have been (mis)treated (Hribal, 2003; Hribal, 2007).

Whilst in some cases working animals may be mistreated, in others they are celebrated and admired. Donna Haraway (2003; 2008), for instance, argues that working dogs are held to be intelligently superior to other domestic dogs, and, thus constitute a special category of ‘subject’, forming strong relationships with their human co-workers. McHugh (2011:16), however, warns of over-romanticising these working relationships, referring to such animals as “service animals” and the human-animal relationships as “working units”. Working animals, then, occupy an ambiguous and paradoxical theoretical space (Nast, 2006; Griffin, 2012). Some animals, such as dogs and horses, in fact, are appropriated for multiple and diverse responsibilities, and are subsequently (re)defined and (re)valued depending on their use. Pearson’s (2016) study of the Franco-Belgian border from the late-nineteenth century, for instance, explores the use of dogs as both smugglers and border police. Smuggling dogs, he argues, were framed as devious and threatening, undermining national security, whilst customs dogs, framed as intelligent and loyal, were employed to defend the border as “living symbols of state authority” (Pearson, 2016:62). “Dogs and the border were refashioned in tandem”, Pearson (2016:62) states, as the “broader reimagining of animal intelligence fed into the various portrayals of custom dogs

as skilled and useful agents". The Franco-Belgian border, then, reveals a "more-than-human process of bordering" or "sites of human-nonhuman entanglements", dogs variously unsettling and reinforcing human delineations of space (Pearson, 2016:62). Parallels could be drawn between this example and the use of racing pigeons as messengers during World War One (see Chapter 6), the birds simultaneously seen as spies and heroes. Racing pigeons are able to move freely over territories and through airspace, their mobility illustrating the permeability of borders and, during times of war, the vulnerability of nations against aerial attack. In addition, British long-distance pigeon racing has long had close international links with Belgium – where pigeon racing is said to have begun – and with France and Spain – where liberations have been taking place since the late-nineteenth century – (see Chapter 6) and, thus, the mobility of racing pigeons traversed national borders.

Some of the closest human-animal interactions in western society, Fox (2006) claims, are those between humans and domestic pets, dogs being the most popular subject of academic research (Haraway, 2003; Nast, 2006; Haraway, 2008; Power, 2008; Power, 2012; Howell, 2015). Pet-keeping has a long history, but it was during the Victorian era, Fox and Gee (2016:109) argue, that "the idea of keeping animals merely for pleasure or companionship became widespread" in Britain. Howell (2015), for instance, has studied the Victorian 'invention' of the domestic dog, discussing material and imagined canine geographies. He identifies conflicting attitudes to dogs between the public and private spheres: in the private sphere, dogs became part of the more-than-human 'respectable' middle-class home, whilst dogs in public spaces had a contentious presence, liminal figures associated with disorder and disease (Howell, 2015). Outside of the home, however, in a different spatial setting, the behaviour of pet dogs was regulated by their owners, leads and muzzles used to maintain human (spatial) control (Howell, 2012; 2015).

Pets have, research has shown, long served as both objects of affection and as social currency indicating status (Ritvo, 1987; Baker, 1993; Donald, 2007; Mangum, 2007). Modern-day pet-keeping is still closely linked to human identities (Sanders, 2003; Fudge, 2008; Power, 2008; Power, 2012; Hughes, 2015; Fox and Gee, 2016). Sanders (2003:412) argues that humans and their pets form an inseparable "couple identity", pets symbolising people's lifestyles and

becoming extensions – and living embodiments – of their human owners. Humans and pets can, then, become intertwined through cohabitation, forming what McHugh (2011:4) calls “cross-species intersubjectivity”. Indeed, Haraway (2008:46), drawing on Marxist thought and the work of David Harvey, refers to pedigree dogs as “lively capital”, treasured for their economic and social value, but also, she claims, “encounter value”, transforming the humans with whom they live. In place of the term ‘pets’, Haraway (2008:16) prefers, instead, ‘companion animals’ – “less a category than a pointer to an ongoing ‘becoming with’” – a more flexible and emergent designation for animals who have such close and complex encounters with humans.

The past thirty years of British pet-keeping, Fox and Gee (2016:124) reveal, has seen a shift from “active ‘domination’ (Tuan, 1984) towards more subtle forms of control in the regulation of animal bodies”. This period, they claim, has seen some of the most rapid changes in human-pet relationships, pets shifting from ‘kin’ to ‘family members’, and humans from ‘owners’ to ‘caretakers’. Whilst fuelled by genuine affection, however, modern human-pet relationships can be problematically underpinned by ownership, objectification, commodification, and fetishization, the growing industries for pet products, services, and healthcare exploiting human attachment to their animals (Nast, 2006; Haraway, 2008; Fox and Gee, 2016).

An alternative approach to understanding human-pet relationships has been to explore the ways in which pets control and shape human interactions with them (Arluke and Sanders, 1996; Sanders, 2003; Haraway, 2003; Irvine, 2004; Fudge, 2008; Haraway, 2008; Power, 2008; Power, 2012). Pet-owners, Fox and Gee (2016) claim, have increasingly expanded the spatial freedom of their pets within the home, allowing them to share their sofas and beds, and designing domestic spaces to suit their pets. Power’s (2008; 2012) studies of dog-keeping have, for instance, revealed the creation of “more-than-human families” or “furry families”, in which human time-space routines are adapted to – and altered by – their dogs (Power, 2008:535). Furthermore, Power (2012:371) argues that, whilst humans may attempt to discipline their pets so that they embody desirable social and moral values – such as cleanliness, orderliness, and discipline – the relationships between humans and pet dogs illustrate “the limitations of human agency”.

2.2 Breeding Animals

As part of domesticating animals, humans have sought to carefully monitor animal breeding. The existing literature examines the physical and metaphorical construction of animals and human-animal relationships through breeding practices, and the moral questions that this raises. Breeding culture, Theunissen (2012:278) argues is an ensemble of “scientific, technical, economic, aesthetic, normative, and commercial considerations”. Through selective breeding, then, humans shape animals to suit their needs, animal bodies becoming malleable and their ‘value’ constructed. From a geographical point of view, breeding can, Holloway et al. (2009:404) contend, be theorised as “a series of moments and spaces in which species meet” and interact. Despret (2008:129) has argued that the human-animal relationships involved in animal breeding are examples of humans and animals working together, what she calls “situations of the extension of subjectivity”. The wider literature on livestock breeding – driven by commercial and functional motivations – and fancy breeding – focused on aesthetics – speaks explicitly to the issues raised in this thesis about human-animal dynamics in selective breeding.

The concept of ‘breed’, research argues, emerged in the eighteenth century, and was institutionalised in the late-nineteenth century by breed societies (Holloway et al., 2009). Thus, breeds are physical and imaginative constructs with no taxonomic designation, Marvin (2005:65) defining them as “a triumph of cultural ideas in combination with a natural form”. Skabelund (2008:335) adds: “animal breeds, like human races, are contingent, constantly changing, culturally constructed categories that are inextricably interconnected to state formation, class structures, and national identities”. ‘Breed’ has, therefore, become an important signifier of ‘truth’ and pedigree in animal populations. The history of German Shepherd breeding, for example, is underpinned by an obsession with ‘purity’ and pedigree, the breed linked to imperial aggression in Nazi Germany (Skabelund, 2008). Thus, selective breeding as a process of (re)forming Nature has been strongly – and provocatively – linked with human supremacy and likened to eugenics (Berry, 2008; Haraway, 2008). Selective breeding can involve “strong elements of ‘design’” (Brady, 2009:6), James Secord (1981:183) referring to the selective breeding of fancy pigeons as “Nature in the guise of artifice”. Holloway (2005:883) argues that planned breeding programmes that aim to produce ‘better’ animal bodies create “social-natural hybrids”, a combination of

‘natural’ and ‘manmade’ forces, “not genetically modified per se...[but] undoubtedly products of genetic manipulation”. Marie (2008) also uses the term ‘hybridizing’ to describe the process of creating new animal breeds, Holloway et al. (2009:403) warning of the “perceived malleability of animal bodies”. Modern use of genetic technology, such as cloning and genetic modification, can similarly redefine animals and Nature (Holloway et al., 2009), the resultant ‘monsters’, Davies (2003:409) argues, portrayed as “miraculous objects of human ingenuity”.

2.2.1 Institutionalising Breeding

In the eighteenth century, MacGregor (2012:426) states, “the search for improvement proved an extraordinary social leveller, in which the aristocracy (and even the king himself) could be found vying with yeoman breeders to produce supreme animals”. Since the mid-nineteenth century, breeders of both livestock and fancy animals – fancy pigeons included (see Chapter 4) – began to organise themselves by forming breed societies, which defined, classified, and intervened in the material forms of animals, attempting to ‘improve’ breeds (Holloway et al., 2009; Ritvo, 2010; Holloway and Morris, 2014). Through such institutions, breeds became “highly engineered genetic material”, Ritvo (2010:165) claims, but also commodities or “genetic capital” over which certain members of society had exclusive control. Holloway (2005) frames these societies as institutionalisations of certain ‘ways of seeing’ animals, which actively redefined breeds and species. Breeders claimed to have, what Rogoff (1998:17) calls, “the good eye”, a sort of “visual connoisseurship” (Holloway, 2005:889) acquired through experience and interaction with animals.

Selectively-bred animals, Holloway (2005:887) argues, become “hybrid combinations of materiality and knowledge”, constructed by the practices of breeders, breed societies, and scientists. Since their advent, breed societies have formalised knowledge-practices in breeding, producing breed standards involving both visual judgements and more quantitative methods of defining breeds (Holloway et al., 2009). A further way of producing knowledge about animals has been the use of stud books, a written performance of pedigree very popular in Victorian livestock and fancy breeding (Ritvo, 1987; 2010). Ritvo (1987:60) argues that stud records were not only practical tools, but also gave animals “dignity and individuality...making it easier for people to identify with

them". Stud records celebrated the prestige of both the animals and their breeders, "both lines of descent...memorialized in volumes", but also reduced these animals to 'data' (Ritvo, 2010:6). Today, Holloway et al. (2009) suggest, such records are still important interventions into, and constructions of, animal lives, linking both human and animal ancestries. Thus, Riley (2011:21) argues, animals can become "important biographical markers" bonded to human lives. The practice of tagging or branding livestock with numbers and letters, Riley (2011) adds, can be seen simultaneously as an act of identification, ownership, and objectification.

Early stud records have been compared to modern breeding technologies (Holloway, 2005; Holloway et al., 2009), both constituting powerful instruments for controlling and defining animal populations. For Holloway et al. (2009), the use of genetic technologies in modern livestock breeding is an example of Foucauldian 'biopower' applied to animal populations. Such technologies are interventions into animal bodies, (re)constructing, (re)defining, and regulating their lives. Thus, animal breeding has political dimensions, the manipulation of animal bodies changing their 'value' (Haraway, 1997; Haraway, 2008; Holloway et al. 2009). Modern-day livestock breeding has, studies have identified, become increasingly scientific and commercially-minded (Holloway, 2005; Theunissen, 2012; Coulter, 2014). These animals, Coulter (2014:145) believes, are not seen as living creatures, but, instead, as financial capital or commodities that can be trade, disposed of, or acquired – "a means to an end". Watts (2000:298) likens livestock breeding to Harvey's (1998) 'sites of accumulation', intensive farming and genetic modification transforming livestock into "horrifying forms of reconstituted nature", shaped and reshaped to meet human demands. Their bodies become both forms of capital and sites of ethical, social, and political contest. Holloway and Morris (2014) add that livestock bodies can be viewed as 'machines', disciplined, manipulated, and 'improved' in order to increase their utility. Modernised livestock breeding, driven by mass-production, speed, and efficiency, has reorganised farm practices which, in turn, has further altered human-animal interactions, mechanisation reducing human proximity to animals (Riley, 2011; Holloway et al., 2014).

Thus, relationships between humans and livestock today are complex and diverse. For Holloway et al (2009:406), these relationships involve "the co-

constitution of the identities and bodies of humans and livestock”. Wilkie (2005), however, highlights ambiguity in the relationships between animal breeders and their studs. Whilst developing emotional attachments to their animals, Wilkie (2005) claims, breeders often have to part with them, culling them, selling them, or giving them away. Wilkie (2005) identifies a spectrum of attachment to animals, with commercial breeders, at one extreme, experiencing ‘detached detachment’, whilst hobby breeders, at the other extreme, may experience ‘attached attachment’. However, such variations in attachment may also be demonstrated by one individual, Riley (2011:21) arguing that farmers “simultaneously hold positions as ‘keeper’ and ‘killer’ ...through a process of recommodification, involving discursively placing animals into ‘appropriate’ categories (such as ‘unhealthy’ or ‘insufficiently productive’) in order that their sale becomes morally justifiable”.

2.2.2 The Fancy

As well as livestock breeding, small-animal fancying also became popular in Britain in the nineteenth century, poultry, rabbits, dogs, cats, and other domestic animals being bred for their aesthetic features, kept as ‘pets’, or exhibited at shows (Ritvo, 1987; Marie, 2008). Fanciers of each species referred to themselves as ‘the Fancy’ (e.g. the pigeon Fancy, the dog Fancy, etc.), a collective identity connecting humans and animals. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*, 2016[online]) defines ‘the Fancy’ as both a collective noun for “those who ‘fancy’ a particular amusement or pursuit”, and “the art or practice of breeding animals so as to develop points of conventional beauty or excellence”. The use of the term in this way has been traced to the eighteenth century, the *OED* (2016[online]) citing John Moore’s (1735) *Columbarium* – a fancy pigeon treatise – as one of the earliest known references. In introducing his book, Moore (1735:2) states: “I...have had recourse to and consulted most of the oldest and most experienced persons that kept pigeons and delighted in this Fancy”. An alternative – and intriguing – definition of ‘the Fancy’, however, can be traced to nineteenth-century boxing, in which *human* bodies were exhibited and their strength tested. ‘The Fancy’ was used to refer to “the prize-ring or those who frequent it” or “the art of boxing” (*OED*, 2016[online]). Both uses of the term, then, denote performative, competitive, and aesthetic expressions of identity.

The literature that examines the Fancy is predominantly written by historians and historians of science, rather than geographers, but they address geographical themes. Like livestock breeding, the history of fancy breeding is complexly intertwined with questions about social class. In the late-nineteenth century, Marie (2008) argues, the use of stud books to monitor pedigree echoed the aristocratic notion of 'birth right'. However, at exhibitions, the animal that best resembled the standard won over those with a better ancestral pedigree, thus, Marie (2008) states, embodying ideas of social mobility. Ritvo (1987:84) also identifies class conflict in nineteenth-century dog breeding in Britain, the Kennel Club's (est. 1873) breed standards criticised as an "elaborate system of categories [which] metaphorically expressed the hopes and fears of fanciers about issues like social status and the need for distinctions between classes". The 'kennel system', Pemberton (2013:201) adds, was founded on notions of ancestry and aristocracy and "predicated upon the social power and legitimacy of the rising middle-classes". In contrast to dog fanciers, Marie (2008) argues that the majority of poultry and rabbit fanciers in the late-nineteenth century did not keep records of pedigree, believing instead in merit regardless of birth, consistent with their mainly working-class heritage. There was, therefore, as some have identified, a hierarchy of fancy animals based loosely on human socio-economic categories: dogs were the most prestigious, kept by the middle and upper classes, whilst poultry and rabbits were 'lesser' animals, bred by the working classes (Ritvo, 1987; Marie, 2008). Nonetheless, despite this generalisation, class divisions could exist amongst fanciers of the same species, as this thesis will illustrate.

Marie's (2008) study of early-twentieth-century rabbit and poultry breeding demonstrates how fancy breeding can cross the boundaries between pet-keeping, commercial breeding, and scientific experiment. Breeders occupied three 'social worlds' – science, fancying, and commerce – united by "common or joint activities or concerns" (Strauss, 1982:172). Marie (2008) suggests that the animals acted as 'boundary objects' – objects common to different social worlds, but carrying different meanings (Star and Griesemer, 1989) – helping 'translation' between different breeders. The complex social networks involved in animal breeding, therefore, construct knowledge about – and perceived values of – animals.

Modern-day animal fancying – and research discussing it – also engages with scientific, ethical, and political agendas. The ethics of modern dog breeding have been heavily criticised by scientists, animal rights groups, and the media. Inbreeding, for instance, has been condemned for causing diseases and deformities, whilst, in other instances, dogs are selectively bred “to preserve, and even accentuate...disabling characteristics” (Serpell, 2003:93), their health and welfare at risk (Williams, 2010). A well-documented example is the English Bulldog, a breed which has come to represent the pride and strength of Englishness, but, in breeding it to preserve the distinctive appearance of its face, the breed has been left with severe breathing problems (Serpell, 2003). For Serpell (2003), this is due to ‘anthropomorphic selection’ in animal breeding; the selection of animals in favour of ‘appealing’ traits that evoke, what has been termed, ‘the cute response’. Dog breeding, Herzog (2006:383) explains, is characterised by “social contagion”; an obsession with fads and crazes for certain breeds or aesthetics, and a desire to create ‘designer dogs’ or fashionable cross-breeds – which, biologically at least, are analogous to other, sometimes belittled, ‘mongrels’. Tastes and fashions are, Herzog (2006:394) argues, “cultural variants”, adding that such changes in dog breed fashions “shed light on the role of human culture on canine evolution”.

Another controversial element of modern fancying, Haraway (2008:104) explains, is the use of biotechnology to create animal companions, modern dog breeds surrounded by “biosocial apparatus” such as scientists, geneticists, research institutes, and vets, working to ‘improve’ breeds genetically, physically, and aesthetically. Berry (2008) adds that a range of cosmetic surgery options for ‘improving’ the appearances of animals are also used: facelifts, ear straightening, Botox, dentistry, tummy tucks, nose jobs, tail correction, and other procedures suggest parallels with the ways in which the *human* body – and, as Chapter 5 reveals, the fancy pigeon’s body – is monitored and manipulated. Thus, fancy breeding can redefine and re-appropriate animals, demonstrating the political nature of human-animal encounters in which appearances are central.

2.3 Displaying Animals

Existing literature also discusses the power of the visual in mediating human-animal relationships in situations where animal bodies are ‘on display’, such as

museums, exhibitions, circuses, zoos, paintings, and photographs. Crang (2010) proposes that exhibition spaces such as the Crystal Palace – discussed in Chapter 4 as an important space for pigeon exhibitions – owe their development to philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s late-eighteenth century ‘Panopticon’, a building design creating the feeling of omnipresence and perpetual surveillance. Taking a Foucauldian approach to spectacle, Crang (2010:209) claims that exhibition spaces are technologies of display or visualisation, “archetypal devices framing society’s way of seeing”. They make the world “knowable and controllable in a particular regime of truth”, he asserts, exhibits becoming “objects of an inquiring gaze” (Crang, 2010:210). Animals on display, therefore, could be considered as cultural objects, their meanings (re)produced and their bodies commodified by a human gaze.

The nineteenth century saw the expansion and rising popularity of zoos, public museums, exhibitions, and other similar entertainment, Altick (1978) suggesting that this was a ‘new age’ of aesthetic culture. The Victorian era was, research has argued, characterised by a fascination with visual appearances, eccentricity, and a desire to categorise and collect (Altick, 1978; Browne and Messenger, 2003; Denenholz Morse and Danahay, 2007; Schmitt, 2007; Feuerstein, 2014), animal displays forming a significant part of public leisure. The Victorians, Cowie (2014:8) suggests, had a “schizophrenic attitude....towards the animal world”, some ridiculed, abused, and excluded, whilst others were loved, admired, and anthropomorphised. Literature on the cultures and technologies of animal display – past and present – speaks explicitly to the exhibition of pigeons explored in this thesis.

2.3.1 Aesthetic Appreciation of Animals

The appreciation and value of animals are usually based on a conflation of moral, emotional, economic, and aesthetic factors (Parsons, 2007; Parsons and Carlson, 2008; Brady, 2009). Philosopher Glenn Parsons (2007:151) argues that “animals are common objects of aesthetic appreciation”, be they pets, exotic specimens in zoos or museums, ‘wild’ animals, working animals, or show breeds. The aesthetic evaluation of animals, so Holloway and Morris (2014:17) contend, is “tangled up with a wider geographical, material and virtual network of breeders, animals, institutions, information and expertise”.

Geographers have been wary of the term 'aesthetics', studies of aesthetics often criticised for indulgence, for neglecting political and ethical considerations, and for separating the 'aesthetic' from the 'real' (Matless, 1997; Holloway and Morris, 2014). Matless (1997:397) explains: "cultural geography has had an uneasy relationship with aesthetic questions...not least because of the ethereal and precious associations often carried by aesthetic discourse". Aesthetic appreciation, Holloway and Morris (2014:4) add, is "historically, socially, politically and...geographically emergent, grounded and differentiated". Dixon (2009) calls for cultural geographers to treat more-than-human aesthetics as complexly linked to politics, rather than separate. Drawing on Rancière's (2004) *Politics of Aesthetics*, Dixon (2009:411) argues that "political struggle is necessarily aesthetic insofar as it is an attempt to reconfigure", whilst artistic practices are essentially political because they "reorder the relations among spaces and times, subjects and objects", creating a tension between the visible and the *invisible*. More-than-human aesthetics, Dixon (2009) claims, provide an example of Foucauldian biopolitics, animals bought and sold for their aesthetic features and used in recreation, manufacture, or experimentation; an example of the commodification of nature. Animal aesthetics, then, can become entangled in political struggles.

Berry's (2008) 'theory of reflected social power', for instance, suggests a close link between animal aesthetics and human status, animals serving as positive reflections on their human owners who wish to be "associated with exotic, beautiful, and special (expensive, dangerous) animals" (Berry, 2008:77). Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction* – in which he argues that social status is defined by possessions or 'cultural capital' and aesthetic choices – Berry (2008:77) suggests that animal "beauty can be seen as a commodity". Holloway and Morris (2014), however, emphasise the importance of considering animals as subjects rather than as objects of aesthetic judgement. The aesthetic appreciation of animals, then, can be morally and politically problematic, shallow and objectifying, what Parsons (2007:156) has called the "immorality explanation". He advocates "a conception of aesthetic value of animals based on the notion of the functionality, or 'fitness', of their form, behaviour, and traits", which he terms 'functional beauty' (Parsons, 2007:152). Thus, rather than making superficial judgements based on appearances, the notion of 'functional beauty' suggests that

beauty arises out of an animal's *functional* aesthetic features. (Parsons, 2007; Parsons and Carlson, 2008). This definition of animal beauty could, therefore, be applied to wild predators admired for their hunting skills, or to racehorses prized for their athletic bodies, and, as discussed in Chapter 7, to racing pigeons. Research has, nonetheless, identified a long-standing conflict between function and aesthetics in animal breeding (Holloway, 2005; Parsons, 2007; Parsons and Carlson, 2008; Theunissen, 2012; Holloway and Morris, 2014).

2.3.2 Exhibiting Animals

Animals on display at exhibitions provide examples of, what Holloway and Morris (2014:1) call, “aesthetic encounters between humans and animals”. The history of animal shows is closely intertwined with the history of produce shows (Secord, 1994; Secord, 2007) and horticultural societies (Secord, 1994; Elliott, 2001; Bonneuil, 2002) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such examples emphasised human dominion over – and curiosity and delight in – Nature’s aesthetic qualities, winning specimens representing their owner’s ingenuity and reputation.

Ingold (2000:21-22) problematizes the act of ‘showing’: “to show something to somebody”, he claims, “is to cause it to be seen or otherwise experienced – whether by touch, taste, smell or hearing...It is, as it were, to lift a veil off”. Whilst showing and being shown often prioritises the visual, Ingold (2000) emphasises other ways of *sensing* aesthetics. The term ‘aesthetic’, in fact, originated from the Greek ‘*aisthethai*’, meaning ‘to perceive’, and was not associated with primarily visual attributes until the late-eighteenth century (OED, 2016[online]). In judging animal shows, Holloway (2005:887) explains, “touch is combined with visual knowledge to produce a complex knowing about assumed relationships between bodily insides and outsides”. Drawing on Ingold (2000), Pitt (2015:50) proposes “knowing through showing”, a method of learning about the non-human which, she argues, shapes our engagements with them. Thus, the exhibition of animals involves the simultaneous display of, and production of knowledge about, animals.

The majority of research on animal exhibitions has focused on agricultural shows, which combine “displays of finely bred animals and new developments in

agricultural machinery” (MacGregor, 2012:438). The latter, Anderson (2003) argues, could be interpreted as Latourian, exhibitions of farm machinery and crops suggesting that humans, animals, and technology can become complexly interconnected. Late-Georgian public sheep-shearing festivals, such as those at Holkham and Woburn, have been identified as the elite precursors to agricultural shows (Ritvo, 1987; MacGregor, 2012). Ritvo (1987:49) argues that these festivals – and accompanying banquets – were celebrations of human identity and achievement: “in toasting their noble animals, the elite livestock fanciers were celebrating themselves”. These shows, then, were associated with prestige and status, as well as breeding animals for profit (Ritvo, 1987). In England, the earliest agricultural shows were in the late-Georgian and early-Victorian periods, underpinned by a strong desire for perfectly-formed, economically-productive animals (Ritvo, 1987; MacGregor, 2012). The philosophy behind these shows was to encourage ‘improvement’ – of animal breeds, farming technology, and methods – through competition, increasing national food security, and fostering an elite culture of breeding (Ritvo, 1987). Ritvo (1987) interprets Victorian animal exhibitions as mirroring society, reflecting elite intelligence, power, and mastery over the lower classes. As well as performances of human identity, agricultural shows could also be interpreted as expressions of human control over Nature. Indeed, Anderson (2003:422) states that “few events perform so ritualistically the triumphal narrative of human ingenuity and agency over the natural world”.

At nineteenth-century agricultural shows, Ritvo (1987) argues, animals were seen as both functional and beautiful spectacles. There was, however, also a performative nature to their aesthetic, livestock made to parade around an arena “in an intricate but precise choreography” (Anderson, 2003:433), a practice that is still carried out today (Holloway, 2004; 2005). This movement was controlled by a ringmaster and “dramatized the triumph of humanity’s experimental elaboration of the nonhuman” (Anderson, 2003:433). Coulter (2014) reveals a similar example in modern horse shows, horses’ behaviour controlled by their trainers and grooms. Show rings, then, Holloway (2005:887) contends, are “settings for choreographed routines of visual assessment of animals”. Human interventions into animals’ bodies, Coulter (2014:144) claims, “also extend beyond training and include the management of feed, supplements, medications, veterinary treatments, daily patterns...equipment, and so forth”. Holloway (2005:887) argues that this manipulation of animal bodies at modern

agricultural shows presents animals in ways that “emphasise desirable, and conceal less favourable, characteristics”, there being an ‘art’ to preparing show animals (see Chapter 5). Anderson (2003:434), for instance, reports how early-twentieth century poultry fanciers “laundered white breeds to bring out the bloom of plumage, an amplification of animal nature”. Thus, animals on display at agricultural shows were, and still are, “hybrid things...dramatizations of human invention and ingenuity...liminal forms that sit in that borderland space between culture and nature, the human and the non-human” (Anderson, 2003:422).

Animal exhibitions can, therefore, be interpreted as performances, although the definition of ‘performance’, Orozco and Parker-Starbuck (2015) criticise, is often narrowly anthropocentric. Cull (2015), for instance, suggests that ‘performance’ is usually considered to be a conscious act, a definition that may exclude animals. The subsequent separation of human subjects and animal objects in such performances, then, raises moral issues over their treatment. In post-Revolution America, for example, Mizelle (2005:219) explains, animal performances were viewed as cruel and “problematic displays of animals”, distinguished by society from ‘legitimate’ animal exhibitions at zoos or museums that produced and disseminated scientific knowledge. Performing animals were also, Altick (1978:40) states, “staples of London entertainment as early as Tudor times”. With the development of circuses in late-eighteenth-century England, animal performances became more prominent features of public entertainment (Orozco and Parker-Starbuck, 2015).

Modern-day circuses have been surrounded by controversy and concerns about the well-being of their animal performers, criticised by research for their cruelty and objectification of animals (Orozco and Parker-Starbuck, 2015; Tait, 2015). This illustrates how academic research on animals is often prompted by ethical and political agendas. During animal performances at circuses, both the animals’ and humans’ bodies are trained, their behaviour scripted, and routines rehearsed to the extent that the relationships portrayed, Tait (2015) claims, become a façade. Thus, in circuses, like in show rings, animal behaviour is – sometimes controversially – controlled by humans. Cataldi (2002:107) suggests that modern-day circus bears are “like puppets on strings, hollowed out, stuffed animals”, which are “externally controlled and manipulated, with the aid of silly props and costumes, in an unnatural (human) setting”. Such bears, she adds, “are

reduced to the status of manipulated objects, treated as toys or playthings” (Cataldi, 2002:119). Some animal displays, then, can produce human-animal encounters that pose challenging moral questions.

2.3.3 Animals in Captivity

The cage is often used as a restrictive and controlling display space for animals. The majority of encounters with caged animals in the nineteenth century, Cowie (2014:2) explains, “occurred in two prime locations: the travelling menagerie and the zoological garden”. Travelling menageries, she adds, began in the eighteenth century as “itinerant animal exhibitions that toured the country in horse-drawn caravans”, growing in size and ambition in the nineteenth century (Cowie, 2014:2). The history of zoos has been traced back to eighteenth-century private collections, such as menageries or cabinets of curiosities (Ritvo, 1987; Findlen, 1996; Davies, 2000; Donald, 2007; Cowie, 2014). In the nineteenth century, Austin (2010:370) contends, ways of displaying and viewing animals shifted “from the elaborate royal menageries of the elite to public exhibitions displaying the strength of a nation” in public zoological gardens. Since their beginnings, zoos have had multiple, overlapping purposes, acting as “places of collection, colonisation, agricultural experimentation, education, and exhibition”, defining animals as commodities, imperial tools, scientific specimens, conveyors of knowledge, and exotic spectacles, but also simultaneously reinforcing different versions of what it means to be ‘human’ (Davies, 2000:247).

Zoos are important spaces for the study of human-animal relationships. A main theme in the literature is the physical and conceptual spatialities of zoos, studies exploring the ways in which animal displays separate species from their ‘natural’ environments, reclassifying them, and constructing an imaginative geography (Anderson, 1995; Davies, 2000). “The zoo is a prison”, Watts (2000:291) suggests, “a space of confinement and a site of enforced marginalisation”. Placing animals in cages creates a conceptual difference, Donald (2007) believes, captive animals construed as ‘in place’, whilst their wild counterparts are ‘out of place’. Zoos have, then, been criticised for reinforcing both the figurative and physical separation of humans and animals (Mullan and Marvin, 1999; Davies, 2000). The cage, Philo (1995:677) explains, keeps animals “at a physical distance”. Indeed, the small cages used in some Victorian menageries have been condemned for

making animals appear more like stuffed specimens than living creatures (Donald, 2007; Austin, 2010).

Animals in zoos, past and present, constitute 'spectacles' for human consumption, "objects of human curiosity", similar to those on display at shows (Ritvo, 1987). The experience constructs a certain way of imagining animals, Berger (1980:21) perceiving zoos as "monuments to the impossibility", paradoxes representing 'impossible' human-animal relationships. Indeed, research has shown that human experiences of animals in zoos are mediated and constructed, these animals becoming cultural representations of the 'natural' world (Anderson, 1998; Davies, 2000; Watts, 2000; Hallman and Benbow, 2006). Thus, zoos have been criticised as 'unnatural', creating a misconception of Nature. The design of nineteenth-century zoological gardens, for instance, whilst devoid of cages, used invisible barriers such as vistas or moats to give the illusion of freedom (Davies, 2000; Donald, 2007).

Animals kept in captivity, then, experience controlled and manipulated encounters with humans. Van Dooren (2016:31) argues that, if bred in captivity, animals will not behave 'authentically', "as their free-living ancestors once did". Crows kept and bred in captivity for conservation projects, he explains, are taught to behave 'naturally' by humans. The idea of 'natural' behaviour is, however, based on an imagined species identity, and, thus, Van Dooren (2016:37) claims, their behaviour is merely "inauthentic imitations". Despite the "subjugated position" of captive animals in zoos, Davies (2000:252) states, they can be "active subjects embodying a form of agency in their ability to continue to challenge, disturb and provoke us". Bear's (2011:301) study of Angelica the octopus' interactions with visitors to a public aquarium also challenges our understanding of captivity, stating: "to argue that a captive animal is any less for being captive is only to further objectify it". Drawing on Haraway (2008), Bear (2011:301) suggests that "animals become with their environments and those around them", having the ability to affect the humans with whom they interact. As this thesis will show, keeping pigeons in captivity – with some, restricted, freedom – moulded the relationships between, and identities of, pigeon fanciers and their birds.

Similar to the show pen or cages in zoos, the display case in natural history museums is a space through which animals are framed and human-animal dynamics are mediated. The display of (dead) animals in natural history museums developed, alongside zoos, out of early private collections such as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cabinets of curiosity (Altick, 1978; Whitaker, 1996; Yanni, 2005). Museums framed a way of seeing and relating to Nature, contributing to knowledge production, scientific discovery, and colonial power (Findlen, 1996; Yanni, 2005; Schmitt, 2007). Drawing on Foucault's (1994) *The Order of Things*, Yanni (2005) suggests that Victorian museum spaces constructed and sustained cultural narratives about the hierarchies within natural history, thus reinforcing human dominion. Nineteenth-century taxidermy practices, for instance, redefined and re-appropriated animals as 'trophies' (Ryan, 2000) – giving them what Patchett (2008) calls an 'afterlife' – and emphasised the superiority of humans over animals. Furthermore, the use of glass display cases generated a way of looking at animals, creating a boundary between the 'viewer' and the 'viewed' (Yanni, 2005; Talairach-Vielmas, 2014). For some, this Victorian fascination with the display of animal 'otherness' reinforced distinctions between humans and animals (Ritvo, 2010), whilst others argue that these displays turned natural history into "a cultural phenomenon" (Jardine and Spary, 1996:8). Animal exhibits in museums, then, were – and still are today – materially, socially, and imaginatively (re)produced.

2.3.4 Picturing Animals

A final way of displaying animals – one with which this thesis engages – is the depiction of animals in paintings and photographs. Such portraits, Holloway (2005:890) argues, fix the multiple and transient definitions of animals into "durable artefacts...transported over space and time". "In keeping with Enlightenment preoccupations with creating new, ideal forms for particular strains of animals that ultimately would emerge as formalized breeds", MacGregor (2012:430) writes, "animal painting gradually emerged as a genre in its own right, spawning in turn a minor industry". Portrait subjects included livestock, pets, show specimens, and sporting animals, artists ranging from amateurs producing paintings for everyday homes to "skilled practitioners commissioned to celebrate the specific achievements of aristocratic or wealthy breeders" (MacGregor, 2012:431). Crang (2010) suggests that images should be

interpreted as 'encounters', making the absent present through 'seeing'. Thus, animal portraiture could, perhaps, be seen as human-animal encounters, reflecting the relationships behind them.

In Georgian and Victorian livestock portraiture, Ritvo (1987; 2010) argues, paintings of prize-winning animals, their proud owners stood by their side, were commissioned to show-off their owner's skill and boost their reputations as breeders. Georgian painter George Stubbs (1724-1806), for instance, became famous for his portraits of racehorses, which, some have argued, show great appreciation for equine form and ability (Taylor, 1965; Edgerton, 1984; Shepherd, 1984; Donald, 2007). Donald (2007) contends that Stubbs granted his horses near-mythical qualities, but also represented the mastery of horse trainers. These paintings were, therefore, metaphorical and physical illustrations of the connections between breeders and animals. There was, MacGregor (2012:431) states, a "high degree of accuracy...expected" from livestock portraiture, which "sought to distinguish the finer points of anatomy and physiognomy that separated one breed from another". Conversely, however, some breeders encouraged artists to emphasise the grandeur of the animal and, simultaneously, their own status (Ritvo, 1987; MacGregor, 2012). Perspective could be used to emphasise the "bulk of the subject", whilst human figures were "often dwarfed by the principal subjects" (MacGregor, 2012:432). Thus, it may be argued that Georgian and Victorian animal portraiture created what Berger (1972) would term 'ways of seeing' – political acts creating an unsettled relationship between what is seen and what can be known about – both animals and their breeders.

Similarly, portraits of pets can act as windows into human-animal relationships, research identifying the growth of pet portraiture – particularly of dogs – parallel to livestock portraiture, in the Georgian and Victorian periods (Ritvo, 1987; Donald, 2007). Georgian painter Thomas Gainsborough's (1727-1788) portraits of dogs, for instance, Donald (2007) argues, reflected human-pet dynamics. In some, the dogs were pictured looking up at their owners, implying, for Donald (2007), respect and loyalty, and emphasising human dominance and control. In others, however, dogs were depicted with a similar expression to their owner, Donald (2007) suggesting that this gave the dogs an individual consciousness. Ritvo (1987) argues that Victorian portraits of dogs reveal a shift in human-dog

relationships. Whilst dogs had previously been kept mainly by women, a fashion emerged in the eighteenth century for aristocratic men to be painted with their canine companions, symbolising their status (Ritvo, 1987; Donald, 2007). Paintings of dogs on their own emerged slightly later, in the early-nineteenth century (Donald, 2007). Edwin Landseer's (1802-1873) portraits of dogs were, according to Donald (2007:127), "the Victorian public's favourite works of art". His paintings, she claims, showed admiration, aiming to embody "the psychology of beasthood", identifying each dog's individual personality (Donald, 2007:127). His work, however, divided critics, his attention to expression interpreted as either "acute observation" or "near-caricature" (Donald, 2007:127). Such paintings were accused of projecting human feelings onto dogs, an example of anthropomorphism which, Donald (2007) claims, is akin to modern representations of animals in films, books, or cartoons.

Photography has also played a role in displaying and defining animals. Since the invention and development of photography in Britain in the 1830s, its technology and usage rapidly advanced (Ryan, 1997; Blunt, 1950; Brown, 2008). In 1854, the London Photographic Society held their first exhibition, the Victorians considering photographs the "perfect marriage between science and art: a mechanical means of allowing nature to copy herself with total accuracy and intricate exactitude" (Ryan, 1997:17). Photography of the natural world was reportedly driven by a desire for precision, accuracy, and objectivity, representations of Nature shifting from art to science (Blunt, 1950). Indeed, photography of the natural world in the nineteenth-century was strongly linked to education, knowledge, and scientific research (Ryan, 1997; Secord, 2002; Austin, 2010). However, "despite the common assumption" during the Victorian era that photography was a "truthful means of representing the world", Ryan (1997:17) warns, "photography was also a social practice whose meanings were structured through cultural codes and conventions". Thus, whilst photography aimed for objective and accurate representation, assumptions linking the visible and the knowable helped to construct 'ways of seeing' animals.

Photography can also be used as a tool for putting animals 'in their place', reinforcing human supremacy and illustrating the relationships between humans and Nature. Technical developments in photography in the 1880s and 1890s made photographing animals in the wild – as opposed to in captivity in zoos or as

stuffed specimens in museums – easier, “notably, the use of new roll film, the increasing portability of cameras, the reduction in exposure times, and the development of telephotographic lenses” (Ryan, 2000:211). Ryan (2000) explains how Colonial photography by travellers, missionaries, and explorers ‘captured’ animals in the British Empire, fabricating imperial wildlife for the British audience, and making the world ‘knowable’. This practice of ‘hunting with the camera’, then, was almost inseparable from hunting with a gun, some believing that ‘camera hunting’ was, in some ways, a more challenging, dangerous, and ethical ‘sport’ (Ryan, 2000; Brower, 2005). As Ryan (2000) identifies, Sontag’s (1979) metaphors of ‘loading’, ‘aiming’, and ‘shooting’ in photography liken it to more exploitative hunting practices. In another example of animal photography, Cataldi (2002) argues that modern professional photography of circus bears with members of the public displace, objectify, exploit, and claim ownership over the animals. They are “looked at and laughed at and photographed for tourists”; the bear is “defiled” and the photographer is a “pimp” (Cataldi, 2002:106). Animal photography, then, can help construct hierarchical human-animal relationships. Other subjects of animal photography have included pets, show animals, livestock, and animals used in sport, the subject of the next section of this literature review.

2.4 Animals in Sport

The engagement of animals – both domestic and wild – in sport is a further example of animal spectacle and performance. Animals have, throughout history, been used as targets to hunt, catch or kill, as competitors against each other, and as “‘equipment’ and devices of ‘competition’” (Young, 2014:288). Studies of sport, Inglis (1977:71) argues, help “make sense of the world”. Sports geography as a subdiscipline engages with questions of identity, politics, and space, examining the corporeal performance of, amongst other things, gender, class, and nationalism (Bale, 1989; Bale and Philo, 1998; Eichberg, 1998; Dine and Crosson, 2010; Johnes, 2010). Similarly, sports history also investigates human identities defined and performed through sport (Metcalf, 1982; Mason, 1988; Bale, 1989; Holt, 1989; Hill and Williams, 1996; Holt, 1996a; Holt, 1996b; Metcalfe, 1996; Williams, 1996a; Williams, 1996b; Day and Oldfield, 2015, Williams, 2015). Animals, however, have mostly been neglected in geographical, historical, and sociological studies of sport, Young (2014:387) criticising this as “speciesist”.

Equally, nonetheless, sport has been “notably absent” from animal geography, McManus and Montoya (2012:400) contending that “articulating animal geographies with critical geographies of sport is important to gain insights into social values, norms, practices and conflicts”.

One of the reasons for the neglect of animals in historical and geographical studies of sports may be due to definitional nuances of the term ‘sport’. ‘Sport’ is physiologically, spatially, and temporally transient, its definition(s) culturally constructed and mutable (Bale and Philo, 1998). As Baker (2013) has suggested, definitions of ‘sport’ commonly associate it with *human* physical exertion. Furthermore, the ‘participants’ in animal sports are not always easily defined. Whilst animals physically compete in these sports, their breeders and trainers are responsible for preparing them, themselves competing for social status. For Johnes (2008), definitions of ‘sport’ should also include ‘leisure’ activities – not necessarily involving physical exertion – comprising competitive contests, skill, organisation, structure, and strong emotional attachment. With this in mind, definitions of ‘sport’ can, therefore, be expanded to include animals.

Animal sports have been surrounded by certain controversies, further illustrating how academic research can be shaped by ethical and political agendas. The betting culture associated with some forms of animal racing, for instance, has, research argues, transformed animals into commodities and status symbols (Vamplew, 2004; McManus and Montoya, 2012; Coulter, 2014; Dashper, 2014). Furthermore, geographers have explored the ways in which animal sports contribute to the production of moral landscapes, where space and resources are contested, such as those used in hunting (Matless, 2000; Woods, 2000; Matless et al., 2005) or conservation (Michel, 1998; Proctor, 1998; Matless, 2000; Matless et al., 2005; Matless, 2014). A perhaps greater concern, however, has been the objectification and exploitation of animals. From the seventeenth century, Hribal (2007) states, the evolution of animal rights movements has been closely allied to increasing inequalities between social classes, the plight of animals mirroring that of the working classes.

The increasing proximity of humans and animals during the Victorian period, Howell (2015) explains, caused heightened concerns over animal welfare. Animal rights historian Hilda Kean (1998:11) argues that, throughout history, human

action to protect animals “tells us more about the political and cultural concerns of society at that time than about the plight of animals per se”. She explains, for example, that the formation of the National Canine Defence League in the 1890s was due to the increasing prominence of dogs in Victorian cultural and political life: dogs were kept as pets, exhibited at shows, and celebrated in paintings, whilst, on the other hand, the streets were frequented by mongrels, strays, and working-dogs (Kean, 1998). Howell (2015) contends that there was a dichotomous moral geography surrounding Victorian dogs, the RSPCA policing cruelty on the streets but not in the home. Similarly, he reveals a paradox at Battersea Dogs’ Home at this time, where the sentiment and sympathy in rehoming dogs was contradicted by the mass euthanization and strict policing of strays.

The first formal animal rights organisation, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, was established in 1824 (Hribal, 2007; Mangum, 2007; Griffin, 2012). Later that century, Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, Kean (1998:70) states, explored “the continuum of human and animal existence, which underpinned much of the impetus towards animal protection”. Darwin emphasised the suffering of animals, “challenging perceptions about the encounters people had on a daily basis with animals” – such as pets, working animals, strays, or animals in zoos or markets – and his work “helped give scientific authority to demands for a raised status for animals within human affairs” (Kean, 1998:71). Thus, by emphasising the complex webs of relations between humans and animals, a heightened sensitivity to animal rights could be fostered.

Animal welfare in sport, such as fighting, hunting, and racing, has increasingly become a key concern of modern-day animal rights activists (Passmore, 1975; Wells and Hepper, 1997; Fudge, 2002; Singer, 2007; Young, 2014). According to the UK-based animal charity PETA (2014[online]), animals used in sports may be drugged, forced to compete when unfit, kept in cramped conditions, and euthanized if unable to compete. Young (2014) compares the ‘hidden’ or ‘disguised’ dimensions of animal sports to Goffman’s (1959) notions of the ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions of social settings. From this perspective, animal sports can be seen as performances in which the visible relationships may be a smokescreen, obscuring the sometimes contentious practices taking place behind the scenes.

Of particular interest to the media, animal rights groups, and politicians – and, as a result, academics – has been the welfare of racehorses. Popular discourses about these animals are, however, McManus and Montoya (2012) argue, constructed from a distance, and conclusions made by people who do not experience the close proximity to horses felt by riders and owners. Animal rights advocates have questioned whether animals enjoy and are willing to participate in sports, as well as the extent to which this can be known (Sunstein, 2003; Webster, 2005). There is, as Berger (1980:24) has emphasised, an “abyss of non-comprehension” between humans and animals, which Johnson (2015) believes makes animals ‘illegible’. Some animal sports, however, Wells and Hepper (1997) state, are not commonly considered harmful, such as certain forms of fishing, show-jumping, and pigeon racing. Their study shows that perceptions of animal suffering in modern sports vary, finding that, in general, women object more than men, but also that “the same individuals approve of some uses of animals (racing or showing animals) but disapprove of others (hunting, circuses)” (Wells and Hepper, 1997:60).

2.4.1 Human-Animal Relationships in Sport

Whether they clarify, construct, or conceal human-animal relationships, animal sports have, research shows, become entangled in questions about identity, acting as ‘cultural texts’ (Geertz, 1972) through which society can be understood. Some sports have reinforced human dominance over animals, Fudge (2002:12), for instance, claiming that mid-sixteenth century monkey-baiting and bear-baiting in London were “a reminder of the superiority of humanity”. She contends, nonetheless, that in trying to preserve the fragile status of ‘human’, human-animal difference was, in fact, blurred. Other animal sports have also become “more than a game” (Geertz, 1972:28), engaging with human class-differences, status rivalry, gender, sexuality, nationalism, and imperial discourse. Ritvo (1987), for instance, argues that Victorian racing animals were placed in various social categories linked to class. Whippets, for instance, were popular amongst working-class miners, whilst greyhounds were favoured by “more genteel sportsmen” (Ritvo, 1987:4). Indeed, some animal sports have been, and continue to be, used to distinguish the aspiring middle and upper classes – such as fox-hunting (Marvin, 2005) and horse-racing (Dashper, 2014) – and some have

been framed as explicit expressions of masculine identity – such as cockfighting (Geertz, 1972), field sports (Pemberton, 2013), game hunting (Ryan, 2000; Brower, 2005), and pigeon racing (Mott, 1973; Johnes, 2007). National identity can also be expressed through animal sports, such as Spanish bullfighting (De Melo, 2014), Balinese cockfighting (Geertz, 1972), and English field sports (Pemberton, 2013). The sports field, then, as De Melo (2014) has argued, is a social phenomenon and an embodied space of spectacle, performance, consumption, politics, and social representation.

Animal sports can also provide insights into human-animal relationships that extend beyond expressions of human dominance and identity. Sebeok (1988) suggests that whilst the training of animals can simply be impersonal behavioural conditioning, in other instances, it can take a more intimate form, humans and animals forming what Ingold (1988) refers to as a ‘partnership’. Haraway (2008), for instance, describes the close relationships formed between humans and agility dogs. Training, she claims, is a “multispecies, subject-shaping encounter”, taking place in ‘contact zones’, spaces in which humans and animals become knotted through interaction and co-presence (Haraway, 2008:205). This, she argues, is an example of animals and humans ‘becoming with’. Agility dogs and their human owners, she explains, are both ‘co-pilots’, training themselves and each other to understand their physical and mental rhythms, and becoming a team. Studies have found that animals can have a degree of influence, not only on the outcome of sports, but also on the human-animal interactions produced (Marvin, 2005; Bear and Eden, 2011; Marvin, 2015). Animal sports, therefore, can be seen as collaborative and cooperative performances, which produce complex intersubjectivities (Geertz, 1972; Marvin, 2005; Haraway, 2008; McManus and Montoya, 2012; Coulter, 2014; Dashper, 2014; Hughes, 2015; Marvin, 2015).

An example of these more intimate relationships can, Marvin (2015:54) argues, be seen in Spanish bullfighting, the term ‘compenetración’ used in the sport – rather romantically, given that the aim of bullfighting is to kill the bull – to describe the “coming together...rapport, mutual understanding or...harmonious relationship” between man and bull. Marvin (2015:54) approaches bullfighting as a collaborative human-animal performance, in which “their coming together becomes a complete partnership”. His earlier study of Foxhounds also reveals a performative and collaborative alliance formed in fox-hunting (Marvin, 2005).

Both the huntsman and the hounds, Marvin (2005:73) contends, are “prepared to work and perform, based on a strong sense of mutual understanding, as a team”. Human-animal relationships in horse-racing can likewise be “based on mutual respect and understanding, and the development of trusting partnerships” (Dashper, 2014:352). Despret (2004:115) claims that riders’ bodies are “transformed by and into a horse’s body”, horses able to read their rider’s muscle movements, which subconsciously mirror what they want from their horse. The ‘participant’ in the sport, therefore, is ambiguous: “both human and horse, are cause and effect of each other’s movements. Both induce and are induced, affect and are affected” (Despret, 2004:115). Thus, McManus and Montoya (2012:404) argue, racehorses “are not simply props for human construction, but are part of a process of mutual corporeality, where co-construction is a corporeal experience”.

Due to such complicated human-animal relationships, animals involved in sport defy definition: they are neither livestock nor pets, but their relationships with humans can exhibit aspects of both (Marvin, 2005; McManus and Montoya, 2012). Dashper (2014:354), for instance, argues that racehorses “occupy a liminal position: at once friend and partner in sporting pursuits, yet easily discarded if they prove not good enough”. This relationship is characterised by both emotional proximity and distance, horses accepted as honorary family members, but remaining distinctly sporting animals rather than pets. Similarly, Marvin (2005:61) states that Foxhounds are “domestic animals but are expected to enact some of the characteristics of a pack of wild dogs”. They live in large packs, their studs recorded, and are killed at the end of their working lives – analogous of farm stock – and yet they are known and recognised as individuals similar to pets (Marvin, 2005). Foxhounds are, however, “never pets of the huntsman, despite the closeness of his daily relationship with them”, a marked spatial separation enforced between the domestic space and the hounds’ kennels (Marvin, 2005:70). As Chapter 7 will discuss, human relationships with racing pigeons reveal similar dynamics.

Animals involved in sport may become the subject of human respect and veneration. In fact, in the nineteenth century, Holt (1996b:139) claims, “animals were more readily accepted than women as the objects of sporting admiration”. Such adoration can, however, be underpinned by egotism and superficial fancies. Geertz (1972:6), for example, explains how Balinese cock-fighters would “spend

an enormous amount of time with their favourites, grooming them, feeding them, discussing them...or just gazing at them with a mixture of rapt admiration and dreamy self-absorption". Similar to breeding and preparing animals for exhibition, great care was taken over the physical and aesthetic qualities of the fighting cocks, as embodiments of their owners' reputations: "their combs are cropped, their plumage dressed, their spurs trimmed, their legs massaged, and they are inspected for flaws with the squinted concentration of a diamond merchant" (Geertz, 1972:6). Similarly, Foxhounds, Marvin (2005:65) argues, are also subject to aesthetic judgement: "scrupulous attention is paid to the breeding of each hound in order to achieve a particular body form that appeals aesthetically...although it is impossible to separate the efficient hound body from that of its aesthetic representation". Thus, animal sports can become entangled in debates about aesthetics – similar to the ways in which the aesthetics of *human* sporting bodies have been "fashioned...worked upon, policed, ornamented and denuded" (Williams, 2015:2) – emphasising an interesting tension between visible appearances and athletic abilities. These examples, including pigeon racing (see Chapter 7), therefore, speak directly to Parsons' (2007) notion of 'functional beauty'.

2.5 Avian Geographies

Whilst the literature on animal geographies is burgeoning and diverse, the majority of research has focused on *mammalian* nonhumans. This thesis, by investigating examples of human-*bird* relationships, contributes to an emerging body of work that could be labelled 'avian geographies'. The remainder of this literature review focusses on birds, making a case for a feathered arm of animal geography. Early geographical studies of human-bird encounters broadly focussed on domestication and economic uses of birds, later shifting their focus to moral landscapes, and, more recently, to interdisciplinary research on affective engagements and avian subjectivity.

Influenced by Sauerian animal geography, Donkin's (1988; 1991) studies of Muscovy Ducks and Guinea Fowl provide some of the earliest works in geography that explicitly sought to scrutinise human-bird relationships. He discussed how these birds, tamed and domesticated, became closely bound into relationships with humans, exploited for meat, fat, and eggs. Donkin believed, however, that domestication was originally driven by religious or spiritual – rather than

economic – motivations; economic gain was a useful by-product dependent upon the animals' behaviour and adaptability. Short's (1982) paper on 'chicken cramming' in Sussex has examined human-bird relations driven explicitly by economic considerations. Poultry had, he states, long been a common feature of farming, but the practice of breeding and fattening chickens to sell became popular in the nineteenth century, due to the growth of railways and agricultural diversification forced by agricultural depression. Short (1982) explains that chicken production was determined by exterior economic and political forces: during World War One, chicken needs for cereals conflicted with human food needs, but egg production became more important at a time when food was scarce, and, by the interwar period, both egg and table bird production peaked. Watts (2000:299), discussing the modern American broiler industry, argues that the development of specialised breeds for meat production in the 1940s meant that chickens became reconstituted 'hybrids'. The development of new turn-of-the-century biotechnologies, Watts (2000:300) claims, "marks a twenty-first-century act of Frankensteinian enclosure". He explains: "first, *confinement* marks both the shift from open range to broiler houses, but also a process of integration within a highly oppressive broiler complex...Second, the *designed animal*, the 'designer chicken', establishes the extent to which nutritional and genetic sciences have produced a 'man-made' broiler to fit the needs of the industry...an archetypical...cyborg" (Watts, 2000:300). Similarly, Joyce et al.'s (2015) recent study of the Hudson Valley Foie Gras facility examines the commodification of ducks. Both human and nonhuman, they contend, are abused and commodified by the industry's nexus of international flows of labourers and ducks. This, they claim, simultaneously 'deadens' labourers and ducks at the facility.

Some of the first avian replies to Wolch and Emel's (1995) call to 'bring the animals back in' focused on the moral geographies of human-bird interaction. Two chapters in Wolch and Emel's (1998) *Animal Geographies*, for instance, unpick the ethics of human-bird relationships. Firstly, Michel's (1998) chapter on Golden Eagle conservation explores the politics of conflicting human and avian needs. She identifies two types of 'wildlife politics of care' – wildlife rehabilitation and (human) environmental education – which help foster an emotional connection to the plight of the eagles. Similarly, Proctor's (1998) chapter on the Spotted Owl considers the moral landscape created by human-animal conflicts over space. He identifies tension between protecting the habitat of the owl – a

prominent icon of the environmental movement in America – and protecting the local economy based on commercial logging. In Philo and Wilbert's (2000) *Animal Spaces Beastly Places*, Matless' (2000) chapter on the moral landscapes of the Norfolk Broads discusses the bittern. This native bird, he explains, has long been a symbol of Broadland, and, since the early-twentieth century, has been the focus of conservation projects in the Broads, "the assumption being that it belongs, and that the place lacks something without it" (Matless, 2000:129). Practices of wildfowling and bird watching, locals believe, may scare or discourage the birds, whilst their relationship with noisy holiday makers was described by one journalist as "ecological stoicism" (Matless, 2000:129). As part of his recent book, Matless (2014:113) expands on the history of wildfowling and avian conservation in the region, arguing that "animal landscapes entail judgements of human conduct, shaping the Broads as public and private space". Private land ownership, he adds, has, in the past, clashed with both public regulation and public rights to fowl. As well as its presence, the bittern's sound – or 'booming' – has also become symbolic of the region (Matless, 2000; 2005; 2014). The theme of bird song is developed by Matless (2005) in a later article, in which he argues that the sonic landscape – or soundscape – of the Broads reflects human-bird dynamics, locals believing that some noisy human activities such as hiking, motorised boating, and driving deter birds. Just like animals, sounds can be deemed 'out of place' and disruptive to environments, creating a moral sonic geography. One final paper investigating moral landscapes is Matless et al.'s (2005) comparison of the animal landscapes created through wildfowling and otter hunting in the second half of the twentieth century. Whilst otter hunting was seen as barbaric, chaotic, and inefficient, wildfowling was, they explain, restyled as a conservation practice, socially justifying their killing. The styles of killing involved in the sports were also contrasted, the shooting of wildfowl seen as more 'clean', precise, and distanced. The sporting space of wildfowling saw men on the ground able to penetrate the skies above to hunt their prey, making efficient use of both horizontal and vertical space.

There is, therefore, an important – and previously unexplored – connection that must be considered between avian geographies and other bodies of geographical research that examine *aerial* space. After all, birds inhabit the skies and the tree tops as much as they do the ground, residing in both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Twenty-first-century geography has seen the emergence of a 'mobile

turn' (Adey, 2008) and associated 'aerial turn' (Graham and Hewitt, 2012). Since Eyal Weizman's (2002) seminal articles on the 'politics of verticality' – a political critique of architecture, landscape, and territory – geographers have sought to understand the complex politics of (human) vertical space, examining how the aerial can be used to target, observe, and define both the individual and the nation (Adey, 2010; Adey et al., 2011; Graham and Hewitt, 2012). Geographers have explored the social, economic, and political implications of air travel (Adey, 2010; Adey, 2008); the geopolitical threats of aerial warfare and surveillance (Adey, 2010; Adey et al., 2011; Elden, 2013); the politics of urban 'vertical sprawl' and the 'aesthetics of ascension' in an age of skyscrapers, sky lobbies, and rooftop restaurants (Graham and Hewitt, 2012); and the geopolitics of territory, borders, and citizenship associated with international airspace (Adey, 2010; Elden, 2013). Peter Adey has provided a substantial contribution to this body of research, arguing that investigating the aerial world changes the ways in which we imagine our place in relation to the rest of the world. What remains now – and is discussed in the second half of this thesis – is for animal geographers to explore the politics of *nonhuman* verticality, and to examine the geographies of *avian* aerial life.

A further theme in geographical studies of birds is the exploration of past human interactions with parts of avian *bodies*. Cole (2016) uses the idea of 'boundary objects' to frame his recent study of what he terms 'almost-animal' geography. Rather than birds per se, Cole (2016) investigates the cultures of egg collecting in the twentieth century. The egg, he claims, had a liminal status "between living and non-living, animal and non-animal", and was configured in different ways: the respectable and scientific practice of oology "metaphorically hollowed out" the egg, whilst, in parallel, egg collectors accused of wildlife crimes practised "the physical blowing out of the insides of the eggs...the creatureliness of the eggs was effaced" (Cole, 2016:28). Arguably another example that could be classed as 'almost-animal' geography is research into the use of birds' feathers – and, indeed, wings, tails, or whole bodies – in fashion and millinery, described by Matless (2014:132) as "masculine shooting culture meets a feminised culture of decoration". Plumage and taxidermy have been closely studied by Merle Patchett. Introducing the 20th issue of *Antennae*, entitled 'Alternative Ornithologies', Patchett (2012a:5) argues that "birds have been incorporated into various forms of artistic and scientific practice over time and place", adding that there has been

an increased interest in the ways in which birds' (shared) lives are understood. Through her writing and her collaborative exhibition at the Royal Alberta Museum in 2012/2013 entitled *Fashioning Feathers: Dead Birds, Millinery Crafts and the Plumage Trade*, she proposes a new type of ornithological study, 'necro-ornithology', whereby life can be understood through death (Patchett, 2012b). She frames avian bodies as corporeal assemblages variously (re)used and (re)defined by humans. This, for instance, is demonstrated by Patchett et al (2011), as they trace the 'biogeographies' of a hen harrier taxidermy specimen in order to tell the histories of human-animal encounter. They focus on three 'sites': a managed estate where the killing of such raptors was a significant part of gamekeeping ('Site of Death'); a taxidermist's workshop where the specimen was 'dressed' ('Site of Transformation'); and a zoological collection at the University of Glasgow where the bird now plays a role in communicating and studying scientific knowledge of the past ('Site of Disposal'). Patchett et al (2011:126) conclude that specimens can have "potent afterlives worth examining and extending".

This is explored further by Pacault and Patchett (2016), in their investigation of nineteenth-century French 'plumassiers', highly-skilled artisans who would treat, dye, and apply fragile feathers to haute couture garments. During the period 1880-1914, known as the 'plume boom', hundreds of millions of birds – many on the brink of extinction – were killed and traded globally for use in fashion, despite campaigns criticising these practices as murderous (Pacault and Patchett, 2016). It is interesting to note here that this period coincides with the early years of formal pigeon exhibition, avian ornamentation cutting across both the fashion industry and fancy pigeon display (see Chapter 5). Exploring the workrooms of the 'last plumassier' in Paris – Lemarié – Pacault and Patchett (2016) refer to the company's carefully archived collection of feathers as an 'avian imperial archive', after Greer's (2012; 2013) own studies of human-bird relationships under imperial influence. Avian specimens – skins, eggs, travel writing, and bird lists – Greer (2012; 2013) claims, have acted as accumulations of colonial knowledge. Collected in the Mediterranean by the British military, the avian archive explored by Greer (2012; 2013) helped to empirically and imaginatively conceptualise the sub-region. "Birds, therefore, entered into geopolitical calculation through practices of imperial region making", British military ornithology contributing to a scientific understanding of the zoogeography (Greer, 2013:1327).

Another – and, perhaps, more popular – approach to geographical studies of human-bird relations has been to explore more-than-human spaces, drawing on ethology to understand bird behaviour. Arguably the biggest contribution has been Michael O’Neal Campbell’s studies of what he terms “urban geographies of avian presence” (Campbell, 2007:78) or “jointly ‘actant’ behaviour” of birds and people in urban spaces (Campbell, 2008a:472). Birds, Campbell (2007:79) claims, “increasingly occupy human spaces...[and] influence people in food provision, recreation land-use and land management”. He has investigated human-bird interaction, adaption, and subjectivity in shared urban spaces in England (Campbell, 2010), Scotland (Campbell, 2006; 2007; 2008b), Canada (Campbell, 2008a; 2009b; 2016), and Ghana (Campbell, 2009b), concluding that bird presence and behaviour – such as foraging, anticipating food, aggression, fear, and learning or adapting behaviour – in urban spaces is dependent upon the density and variety of vegetation, as well as the presence and behaviour – particularly feeding strategies – of humans. Campbell (2007:86) frames urban birds as “active negotiators and partners with people in shared spaces”. Birds are “among the commonest and most visible animals of urban green spaces” and, thus, Campbell (2006:301) claims, by understanding the spatial interactions of humans and birds, as well as avian agency, urban spaces can be better planned and managed.

Hovorka’s (2008:95) study of urban chickens in Botswana similarly demonstrates how “animals are shaped by, and are themselves central actors in the constitution of, urban form, function, and dynamics”. Her ‘transspecies urban theory’ seeks to understand human relations with urban livestock in order to make sense of urbanisation in Africa. She argues that the presence of chickens in cities not only plays an important economic role, but also shapes the spatialities and lived dynamics of urban life. McKiernan and Instone (2016) likewise investigate the co-constitution of spaces, humans, and birds. They argue that urban populations of ibis in Australia have created the ‘more-than-human city’. Demonstrating how narratives about the ibis have been mobilised and reproduced in the media, constructing a negative species identity, McKiernan and Instone (2016:479) argue that living-with nonhumans often entails new modes of relating that are “never fully comfortable”. The ibis, they explain, are seen by some as ‘environmental refugees’, made homeless by habitat loss, but its

transgressive behaviour is 'out of place' in the urban setting, causing some attempts to manage (by culling) their populations. At once a victim and a pest, McKiernan and Instone (2016) demonstrate that coexistence and cohabitation can, in fact, pull species apart (see Ginn, 2014) rather than draw them closer together.

In comparison, *non-urban* environments have been relatively understudied. Brettell's (2016) study of red kites at an RSPB visitor centre explores the spectacle and display of public feeding talks, which are, he claims, simultaneously educational events and opportunities for interaction and encounter with the birds. "It is as if this space becomes an arena", Brettell (2016:284) describes, "a concert hall for the playing out of a symphony between bodies, movement and spacetimes". He continues: "birds spiral and twist...a corkscrew of kites connects ground to altitude...their physicality of flight sews together a tapestry of the here-and-now as the birds draw a domed ceiling above the arena, there is at once a closing-in and a keeping-out of play, our worlds have come-together, and yet theirs still seems so distant" (Brettell, 2016:284). This proximity of human and animal bodies, he argues, reconfigures notions of 'wildness' and 'natural', arguing for a plural, emergent, and relational understanding of nature as 'multinatural'. Van Dooren (2014b; 2016) has also studied human-bird relationships in conservation, focussing on crows. His study of attempts to reintroduce crows to Hawaii's forests draws on ethology and ecology, approaching the issue through the lens of mourning (Van Dooren, 2014b). Learning to mourn *with* the threatened crows, Van Dooren (2014b:285) claims, "is about more than any single species, or any number of individual species, but must instead be a process of relearning our place in a *shared world*". This study also forms part of a book project which considers "lively stories" of avian extinction – the albatross in the North Pacific, Indian vultures, penguins in liminal littoral spaces, captive cranes, and Hawaiian crows – framing extinction as a mode of 'collective dying' with important cultural and ethical significance to humans (Van Dooren, 2014a:1). In a later paper, however, as discussed above, he explores the implications of keeping crows in captivity, arguing that their behaviour becomes 'inauthentic', their species identity modified to the extent that the 'natural' crow no longer exists (Van Dooren, 2016).

This review of 'avian geographies' has, thus, identified a gap in the emerging literature, namely human relationships with *domesticated* birds. One potential reason for this may be due to the relatively few instances in which humans have successfully – and truly – domesticated birds. Despret's (2014) recent contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies*, for instance, discusses the challenges avian ethologists face. Examining scientists' interactions with Arabian babblers, 'habituation' of the birds, she suggests, "is not due to the work of the scientists, but rather to the way animals perceive the very practical role of their observer"; their behaviour is dependent on their perceptions of the scientists, who themselves 'produce' definitions of the birds (Despret, 2014:34). The birds, she claims, 'allow' the presence of humans and the process of taming them, further complicating the status of these birds. The Arabian babbler, then, like many other species of bird, is not quite wild but not quite domesticated, thus defying categorisation.

2.6 A Place for Pigeons

The final part of this literature review outlines existing research that explores *domestic* pigeons and identifies the underexplored areas that this thesis addresses. The literature on pigeon showing and pigeon racing derives from a wide variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, history, and geography. Studies have largely focused on the socio-economic dimensions of the pastimes, attempting to unravel the human identities constructed and reinforced by pigeon fancying. The gap in the literature, however, is the detailed study of the birds themselves. This thesis provides the first deep geographical study of the human-pigeon relationships involved in pigeon fancying, thus contributing to emerging avian geographies.

2.6.1 Pigeon Showing

The exhibition of fancy pigeons has been relatively untouched by academic research. The British Pigeon Fancy, Johnes (2007:362) claims, originated in the late-eighteenth century – "out of a wider fashion for bird, butterfly and bee fancying, which itself developed out of an increasing appreciation for natural fauna" – and, James Secord (1981) argues, gained momentum throughout the nineteenth century. The few studies that examine the history of pigeon showing

have investigated the pastime's socio-economic geographies, discussing class and identity.

James Secord (1981:171) argues that Victorian pigeon fancying "served as pretext for social gatherings and congenial conversation", identifying what he calls three "social locations of knowledge": periodical publications, shows, and clubs or societies. "In many ways the pigeon clubs provided the clearest institutional expression of the aims of the fancy", he argues, clubs regulating breeding, standards, and show conduct, as well as holding meetings and other social gatherings (Secord, 1981:172). The earliest societies arose in eighteenth-century coffee houses, taverns, and public houses (Secord, 1981) which, Anne Secord (1994) has suggested, was common for fancying and botany societies at the time. The public house, however, Secord (1994; 2002) explains, since the beginnings of the Temperance movement in the 1830s, was not seen as a 'respectable' means of leisure, nor as an appropriate or moral location for the production of knowledge, due to its association with drunken disorder (see Chapters 4 and 6). As a result, Anne Secord (1994; 2002) explains, this was thought to have contributed towards pigeon fancying's bad reputation amongst some – mainly middle-class – members of the public.

Whilst the exhibition of fancy pigeons in the nineteenth century was very popular in northern Britain – Cumbria, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Northumberland – the pastime had a wider geographical reach. Spitalfields in London's East End, anthropologist Feeley-Harnik (2004:332) explains, was "the cradle of the fancy" and home to one of the most well-known London bird markets at Club Row live animal market. The pastime has been strongly associated with the working classes (Secord, 1981; Secord, 1994). Feeley-Harnik (2004; 2007) argues that the exhibition of pigeons – which she also linked to the cultivation of flowers – embodied nineteenth-century working-class ideals of craftsmanship and skill, particularly amongst weavers. "The scrutinising eye of the pigeon fanciers, so apparent in the handling of their birds", she claims, "has its corollary, perhaps its prototype, or more likely its interactive counterpart, in the scrutinising eye required in the most skilled work", grouping silk weaving and pigeon fancying together as forms of "aesthetic expression" (Feeley-Harnik, 2004:342).

Some research has, however, found a much wider social spectrum of pigeon fanciers. Nicholls (2009:790) states that “breeding ‘fancy’ pigeons was an extraordinarily popular pastime in Victorian Britain, with enthusiasts spanning the entire social spectrum”. Two of the earliest fancy pigeon societies – the Columbarian Society (est. 1750) and the Philoperisteron Society (est. 1847) – were, in fact, exclusively reserved for London’s elite (see Chapter 4). James Secord (1981) suggests that, whilst there were class divisions between clubs, by the mid-nineteenth century, there was a growing number of clubs open to all. Indeed, the working classes, Anne Secord (1994) argues, could compete – and win – against fanciers of higher social ranking.

One of the most well-known members of the Philoperisteron Society was Charles Darwin, who was introduced by naturalist William Yarrell to William Tegetmeier (see Chapter 5), a naturalist and well-known pigeon fancier, judge, and author. Tegetmeier became an important intermediary between two social worlds – fancying and science – helping Darwin with his research, introducing him to fanciers and, in turn, translating his theories to the Fancy (Secord, 1981). In writing *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Variation of Plants and Animals Under Domestication* (1868), Darwin immersed himself into the world of fancy pigeons, joining societies and subscribing to newspapers (Secord, 1981; Bartley, 1992; Nicholls, 2000; Feeley-Harnik, 2004; Feeley-Harnik, 2007; Berra, 2009; Largent, 2009). Darwin’s principles of natural selection, variation, and selective breeding drew very heavily on his research with fancy pigeons (see Chapter 5), an approach which, Desmond and Moore (1991:246) argue, was unusual and innovative, since “most naturalists disdained pigeons and poultry”, believing that “science was not done in the farmyard.

The only two studies of *modern-day* pigeon shows that have been identified are both American popular culture ethnographies. Science writer Courtney Humphries (2008:40) frames large American pigeon shows as ‘beauty pageants’, “enough to convince anyone”, she claims, “that pigeons must be one of the most malleable creatures on earth”. Journalist Andrew Blechman (2006:42), on the other hand, compares the pastime to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, calling these ‘artificially’ created pigeons “some of the strangest looking feathered beasts”. The showroom, Blechman (2006:42) explains, “cackles with excited breeders”, who gather to admire thousands of pigeons. Like the modern pet industry, fancy

pigeon breeding has been commercialised, exhibitions including stalls “filled with a plethora of pigeon products...avian medications...hoes and hand scrapers for cleaning...[a] selection of protein and vitamin blends, with names like Hemoglobol and Victory Pills, [that] wouldn’t look out of place in a gym” (Blechman, 2006:61). These birds’ aesthetics are the basis of their owners’ identities within the Fancy, pigeons acting as status-building tools.

2.6.2 Pigeon Racing

Whilst there have been some studies exploring the history of British pigeon racing, sports historian Martin Johnes (2007:361) argues that the pastime has been neglected, “a missed opportunity” in historical studies of sport. As Johnes (2007) and Baker (2013) explain, a chief reason for this may be the fragmented historical record of pigeon racing. Most books that discuss the history of the sport are, in fact, written by and intended for pigeon racers. *British Homing World* journalist Marie Ditcher’s (1991) book, for instance, aimed at ‘you, the fancier’, traces the sport’s evolution from its origins to the start of the twentieth century, detailing the methods and motivations of some of its most important Belgian and English pioneers. This thesis draws on literature from the Fancy, making links to academic work, in order to expand on the sport’s wider implications for a historical geographical understanding of human-animal relationships.

The most comprehensive attempt so far to piece together the history of pigeon racing from an academic perspective is Johnes’ (2007) study of the sport’s socio-economic history. Discussing the strong links between pigeon racing and working-class masculinity, Johnes (2007) postulates the reasons for which people took up the sport, arguing that it provided competition, excitement, respect, self-esteem, respite from home or work, connection with Nature, and intellectual challenge. Ultimately, these racers gained great pride from the sport, their birds becoming embodiments of their skill and status (Johnes, 2007).

Baker’s (2013) study of the history of French pigeon racing also has a socio-economic focus, tracing the close links between the growth of pigeon racing and increased leisure time, improved infrastructure, and the arrival of Belgian immigrants. Indeed, the origins of pigeon racing as an organised sport, most sources agree, lie in eighteenth-century Belgium (Levi, 1957; Mott, 1973; Baker,

2013; Ditcher, 1991; Johnes, 2007). Baker (2013) states that, by the 1860s, Belgian clubs were liberating across the border in France and, from the 1870s, Belgian immigrants living in France applied for French citizenship in order to continue their sport. Pigeon racing in nineteenth-century France was very closely linked to French – and Belgian – nationality. Thus, like Pearson's (2016) Franco-Belgian border dogs, racing pigeons were also crossing international borders into foreign territories (see Chapter 6) demonstrating the permeability of borders and the more-than-human processes in nation-building.

British pigeon racing, it is believed, began in the second half of the eighteenth century, growing out of the use of pigeons as messengers, a practice stemming back to at least the Roman Empire and exploited for commercial and wartime uses (Mott, 1973; Simms, 1979; Ditcher, 1991; Hansell, 1998; Blechman, 2006; Gardiner, 2006; Johnes, 2007; Allen, 2009; Baker, 2013). The use of messenger pigeons to carry commercial and financial news in the nineteenth century was an internationally competitive activity. Well-known examples include the Rothschilds' pigeon service – which enabled them to exploit the stock-market following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 – and Reuters' messenger pigeon links between Aachen and Brussels and London and Paris in the 1850s (Blechman, 2006; Allen, 2009). There is a growing popular history literature that discusses the use of animals – including pigeons – in war (Cooper, 1983, Gardiner, 2006, Long, 2012). It was reportedly during the Siege of Paris in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) that the importance of pigeons as messengers was confirmed, racing pigeons later becoming instrumental in the two World Wars for carrying messages from the trenches, mobile pigeon lofts, tanks, aeroplanes, and submarines (Simms, 1979; Hansell and Hansell, 1988; Hansell, 1998; Blechman, 2006; Johnes, 2007; Allen, 2009; Baker, 2013). Pigeons have been awarded the PDSA's Dickin Medal (est. 1943) – referred to as the animal Victoria Cross – for their wartime efforts thirty-two times, more than any other species (Gardiner, 2006).

An interesting connection that has not yet been made by previous studies is the links between pigeon racing and the development of air travel. Long-distance pigeon racing, it could be argued, was part of an emerging 'Era of Air', during which the *human* dream of mastering flight was becoming a reality. "Since the earliest recorded history", Goodheart (2011:31) contends, "humans have shared

a nearly universal desire for the freedom of flight”, from early ‘ornithopters’ modelled on the mechanics of birds’ wings, to nineteenth-century ballooning and gliders, to the first engine-powered aircraft in the early-twentieth century. By then, long-distance pigeon racing was already well-established and continually expanding. Aeroplanes were in use by World War One – by contrast, a politically complicated period for racing pigeon mobility (see Chapter 6) – and commercial and private flights became very popular during the interwar years, the public associating air travel with aspiration, progress, romance, and adventure (Hudson, 1972; Culpin, 1987; Sealy, 1996; Goodheart, 2011).

The parallels between long-distance pigeon racing and the emerging ‘Aerial Age’ demonstrate how studies of pigeon racing can engage with literature on the politics of verticality. Pigeon racers desired to conquer the skies through their sport. Their birds’ flying routes formed links internally, between distant towns, and externally, between Britain and mainland Europe. On their journeys, birds crossed freely over different territories and into different airspaces, thus demonstrating both their mobility and the permeability of national borders. The incredible speed with which racing pigeons made these journeys distorted notions of distance, but also helped to bind together distant places due to the strong communication necessary between the liberation point and the home lofts (see Chapter 6). The same can be said for the aeroplane, Sealy (1996:29) arguing that air travel “made all points on the Earth nearer to each other”, thus acting as a form of time-space compression.

Furthermore, both pigeon racing and air travel, as means of mastering the skies, helped foster strong identities, altering, as Adey (2010) suggests, the ways in which people imagined their ‘place’ in the world. The air, then, was an arena of sociability for pigeon racers and society in general, and this was a period of ‘becoming aerial’. For pigeon racers, their birds’ abilities to travel across the skies, through the relatively unknown and potentially dangerous arena of the air, reflected highly on their own status and reputation. The ascension of their birds became a metaphor for their own social ascension. ‘Progress’ in the sport was synonymous with birds’ progress through the air, fast flight times and high return rates demonstrating the improvement of the sport’s birds, organisation, and practices (see Chapter 6).

Air travel – and, indeed, pigeon racing – creates strong links between the skies and the ground, but, on the other hand, also fashions a “divisional artifice between the earth and the sky”, between who can and cannot experience the aerial (Adey, 2010:18). Thus, the sport helped connect pigeon racers on the ground to their birds in the sky, but, equally, this aerial life separated humans from pigeons. Their birds represented the mobility and freedom that some of the lower classes were denied in their work and social lives. They also, however, gave the lower classes a chance to conquer the air which they were otherwise denied, early passengers on scheduled flights, Hudson (1972:14) explains, coming from “much further up the social scale”. The general public in the early-twentieth century, then, were “air hungry”, a hunger which, for pigeon racers, could be satisfied through their sport (Hudson, 1972:13).

Pigeon racing, whilst certainly common in northern England, was, in fact, widespread across the whole of Britain, Johnes (2007) finding no substantial evidence to suggest a correlation with geographical location. Early pigeon races in early-nineteenth-century Britain were short-distance – only a couple of miles – and participants were almost entirely members of the working class (Clapson, 1992; Johnes, 2007). This version of the sport, it is claimed, had a bad reputation, associated with betting, disorganisation, and heavy drinking in public houses (see Chapter 6) (Mott, 1973; Clapson, 1992; Johnes, 2007). In the final decades of the nineteenth century, however, short-distance racing gave way to more formalised long-distance racing, facilitated by the rail network, which attracted some wealthier members of society, “more ‘reputable’ clientele” (Johnes, 2007:365). Pigeon racing, therefore, has “two distinct histories: short-distance racing, intensely communal, disreputable, and associated with gambling, which virtually perished in the last war; and long-distance racing, intensely competitive, national, and very respectable” (Mott, 1973:86). This thesis engages with the more widespread and socially-diverse *long-distance* pigeon racing (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Historical studies of pigeon racing thus far have focused on class and gender, the majority linking all forms of pigeon racing with working-class masculinity in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (Mass Observation, 1943; Mott, 1973; Bragg, 1979; Holt, 1989). This reflects broader trends in sports history, Holt (1996b) claiming that studies of the impact of sports in general on working-

class culture dominate research. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth century long-distance pigeon racing, then, not unlike its short-distance counterpart, was very popular amongst working-class men, often referred to as ‘the poor man’s horse racing’ (Bragg, 1979; Johnes, 2007; Jerolmack, 2013). Johnes (2007) argues that the sport was an example of ‘voluntary leisure’, which gave working-men dignity, stimulation, autonomy, competition, and pleasure that they were otherwise denied at work (McKibbin, 1983), and drew on their strong belief in valuing ‘skill’ as a possession. Most studies have found that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pigeon racing was very popular amongst miners and weavers (Mott, 1973; Metcalfe, 1982), although Johnes (2007) states that there is little evidence of direct correlation with occupation. Sociologist and historian of leisure James Motts’ (1973) analysis of the occupations of pigeon racers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries found that the sport was very popular amongst Huguenot weavers in Spitalfields and with miners who sought autonomy, responsibility, recognition, and class solidarity. According to Mott (1973:95), pigeon racing amongst miners acted as “a kind of freemasonry, with its secrets, ritual practices and strong tradition of mutual aid”, sport in general fashioning a sense of community in mining areas (Mass Observation, 1943; Metcalfe, 1982; Holt, 1989).

Nonetheless, despite its close associations with the working classes, long-distance pigeon racing, Johnes (2007) reveals, attracted racers of all classes – including the Royal Family – who competed together (see Chapter 6). The organisational and administrative skills of the middle classes facilitated the institutionalisation of the sport in Britain, fulfilling instrumental roles in some clubs and societies, and helping the formation of a national governing body, the National Homing Union – now the Royal Pigeon Racing Association – in 1896 (Johnes, 2007). Pigeon racing literature at the time, MacGregor (2012) has argued, portrayed the sport as a new ‘science’, locating the pastime within experimental knowledge and natural history, a pursuit for some of the highest men in society. This, therefore, illustrates, as McKibbin (1998) has argued, the inaccuracy of generalised links between class and sport, due to variations *within* sports.

Long-distance pigeon racing was, Johnes (2007:362) states, “part of the complex social environment in which masculinity was forged”. Of the *women* involved, he

adds, “the historical record tells us virtually nothing” (Johnes, 2007:370). Indeed, McKibbin (1998) reveals a similar trend in sports history more generally, stories of women generally absent from historical studies of working-class sport. There was, he claims “hostility” towards women – particularly working-class women – playing sports, and, as a result, there were few facilities or opportunities for them (McKibbin, 1998:368). Drawing on Tosh’s (1994) conception of Victorian ‘manliness’, Johnes (2007) argues that nineteenth-century pigeon racing was a public performance of masculinity, combining ideals such as self-control, hard work, and independence. A crucial dynamic of Victorian masculinity, Tosh (1994) argues, was a complex relationship between home, work, and leisure, the balance between these three spheres inherently unstable. For Johnes (2007), pigeon racing altered this balance, some racers dedicating themselves to their birds at the expense of their families and in conflict with working hours. The pigeon loft, then, Johnes (2007) argues, could become a masculine enclave, the sport becoming an example of, what Tosh (1994) has called, ‘all-male association’. Conversely, however, research has found that pigeon racing could also be a *family* pursuit, bringing together fathers and their children (Mott, 1973; Johnes, 2007).

Members of racing pigeon clubs – like fancy pigeon societies – met in public houses, “thus combining the sociability that drink and voluntary association provided” (Johnes, 2007:372). In the nineteenth century, clubs, taverns, and bars became working-class spaces, which “oiled the wheels of friendship, politics and leisure (as well as business)” (Tosh, 1994:187). At this time, Anne Secord (1994) suggests, place became class-specific through various attempts to regulate and classify space – such as enclosures, game laws, and the geographical demarcation of towns – excluding the poor from formerly public spaces. As a result, middle-class ‘sober’ leisure took place, instead, in exclusive locations such as libraries, museums, and private homes, whilst pastimes that took place in public houses, such as pigeon racing – and, as mentioned, pigeon showing – were viewed with suspicion by some members of the public (see Chapter 6) (Secord, 1994). Indeed, pigeon racing had a bad public reputation which, Johnes (2007) suggests, was largely due to the sport’s association with drinking, as well as early short-distance racing’s disorganisation and gambling (see Chapter 6).

Long-distance racing still, nonetheless, involved gambling in the form of pool betting (Clapson, 1992). Pool betting, Clapson (1992:99) claims, was “as much a

product of bird racing as the *pari mutual* in horses or football betting". Gambling in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries acted as a popular form of mathematics and scientific sensibility, evolving into mass commercialised activities, although betting on pigeon races remained informal. Gambling cut across all social classes, "an essential feature of both plebeian and patrician, lower-class and noble recreation" (Clapson, 1992:16). Nonetheless, there were complex class dynamics behind the activity; "whilst the rich might still be allowed to bet privately with luxuries", Clapson, (1992:39) explains, "the poor could not be allowed to endanger their own economic interests, nor to cause a public nuisance, by betting away their scarce resources". "From the early Victorian years", Clapson (1992:39) adds, "betting and gambling was designated as both a moral and social problem" by the religious and professional middle classes, "which offended the legitimate processes of money making and acquisition of property", legal campaigns against gambling peaking in the Edwardian era. However, "despite the claims of irrationality and wastefulness made against them", Clapson (1992:10) explains, people who participated in gambling had "a complex system of beliefs and betting strategies which was almost always underpinned by self-restraint".

For some members of the public, Mott (1973:95) explains, pigeon racing was seen as "an index of the corruption and immorality of the working classes", whilst Johnes (2007) adds that others believed working-class pigeon racers to be wasting what little money they had. Nonetheless, despite its associations with drinking and gambling, Johnes (2007) identifies three main factors that helped raise the status and public reputation of pigeon racing: the successes of pigeons in wars, the Royal support for the pastime, and the sport's increasing organisation, led by its middle-class adherents.

Whilst long-distance pigeon racing was popular amongst the working classes, Johnes (2007:374) argues that their participation in the sport was severely restricted by "wider social and economic structures", over which they had no control. The sport became increasingly expensive – clocks, baskets, railway rates, and pedigree birds could be pricey (see Chapter 6) – causing men to 'drift' in and out "according to their financial and domestic circumstances" (Johnes, 2007:375). Space was also a restriction for the working classes, who rarely had gardens and therefore used small backyards or the limited supply of allotments (Johnes,

2007). Furthermore, interwar slum clearances and the movement of people into council houses threatened the sport, local councils banning the keeping of pigeons on the grounds that they were “dirty, unhygienic and a nuisance” (Johnes, 2007:375). This ban was, however, not universal, some local councils persuaded to reverse their bans, particularly as war with Germany at the end of the 1930s became more likely (Johnes, 2007).

Whilst the expansion of pigeon racing was closely bound up with the wider socio-economic history of Britain, so too was its decline. Unemployment, depression, and de-industrialisation in the 1930s reduced leisure activities in general, pigeon racing suffering as a result (Mott, 1973; Johnes, 2007). Mass Observation’s (1943:284) social survey of ‘Worktown’ – an anonymous town in northern England – found that the sport’s declining popularity was “symptomatic” of general economic depression, the fading out of traditional working-class life, and the decline of “local forms of culture that are skilled, active and communal, in favour of newer and passive forms of leisure”, particularly in mining and industrial areas. Mott (1973:94) adds that “the influence of television and commercial entertainment” such as cinemas posed a threat to the sport, the decline of which appears to have continued into the early-twenty-first century (Collings, 2007; Jerolmack, 2013). “While the decline of urban pigeon fancying is a story about neighbourhood change”, Jerolmack (2013:224) suggests, “it is also...a story about our changing relationships with animals and nature in the city”.

Modern-day pigeon racers, Blechman (2006:29) states, demonstrate incredible respect and admiration for their birds, “little heroes capable of performing astonishing athletic feats”. As such, racers’ homes are filled with pigeon portraits, race certificates, and trophies, showing pride in both their birds’ performances and in their own reputations (Blechman, 2006; Jerolmack, 2013). Sociologist Colin Jerolmack (2013:105) – in one of the largest ethnographic studies of modern pigeon racing – suggests that “through crafting and taming” their birds, racers are “able to make pigeons into objects of their affection”, developing intimate human-animal relationships. Indeed, for Allen (2009:11), whilst there are “no diamanté collars or luxury bedding for the humble [racing] pigeon”, she believes that “the bond between human and bird, feather, skin, wing and finger, is exquisite in its intensity and earthiness”. Studies of historical pigeon racing have,

however, tended to warn against over-sentimentalising racer-pigeon relationships, explaining that, whilst racers expressed genuine affection for their birds, racing pigeons were not viewed as pets and were killed by their owners if their performances were unsatisfactory (see Chapter 7) (Johnes, 2007; Baker, 2013).

Blechman (2006:3) describes the modern racing pigeon Fancy as a “pigeon-centric world” or a “universe” with a “shaggy patchwork of obsessive subcultures”. These subcultures are geographically and temporally diverse, pigeon racing today coming in alternative forms in addition to the perhaps ‘traditional’ idea of the sport. ‘One Loft Races’, Jerolmack (2013) argues, are the pinnacle of the sport’s modernisation, commercialisation, and globalisation. In these long-distance races, owners from around the world send their birds to live at special lofts, where professional loft managers, trainers, and vets are employed to ‘condition’ these “feathered athletes” (Jerolmack, 2013:192). Thus, similar to the modernisation of agricultural practices, this modern twist on pigeon racing changes the human-animal interactions involved and distances racers from their birds, the birds’ owners playing no part in their preparation and training. This, Jerolmack (2013:194) argues, has ‘levelled the playing field’, race results being “based purely on their birds’ ‘true’ abilities” rather than on their racers’ finances. South Africa’s Million Dollar Pigeon Race in Sun City – a 400-mile race for 1,500+ birds – is the most well-known One Loft Race, termed the ‘Olympics’ of pigeon racing (Collings, 2007; Jerolmack, 2013). Describing his visit to Sun City, British journalist Mark Collings (2007) explains that an auditorium seating 6,000 people called ‘the Superbowl’ is fitted with a big screen for racers to watch the birds return, a live stream also available online. The sport, Jerolmack (2013:161) adds, can be interpreted as a “social dramatization” in which human identities are contested and created. “The event’s glitzy aura” (Jerolmack, 2013:193) and spectacle, however, is a contrast to another variant of pigeon racing, the practice of ‘pigeon flying’, whereby birds are released from roof-tops in groups to see how high or for how long they can fly (Jerolmack, 2007; 2009a; 2013). This animal practice facilitates the formation and organisation of social relationships, pigeon flyers forming a collective identity which, in New York City, has integrated Puerto Rican and African American immigrants (Jerolmack, 2009a), whilst, in Berlin, it has reconnected Turkish immigrants to their homeland (Jerolmack, 2007; 2013).

Thus, shared animal practices can carve out human social worlds, pigeons becoming extensions or ‘anchors’ of the individual self.

2.7 Conclusion

Having discussed the history and development of animal geography, and reviewed a selection of themes from the vast body of interdisciplinary literature relevant to the sub-discipline, this chapter has identified a bird-shaped gap in existing animal geography literature. Through exploring the examples of fancy pigeons and racing pigeons – the institutionalisation of breeding practices; the organisation and regulation of practices; and the display and performance of these birds – this thesis offers new ways of thinking about human-bird encounters under domestication, providing the first critical substantive study of human-pigeon relationships. It can be argued, therefore, that this thesis has a distinctive place within emerging avian geographies.

Chapter 3 Tracing Pigeons: Methodology

Uncovering historical traces of animals can be challenging, given the very human-centric nature of record-keeping (Fudge, 2002; Buller, 2014b). Historical records, then, often tell limited – or, in some cases, completely exclude – stories about past animals. Knowing that Johnes (2007) and Baker (2013) had already identified a lack of administrative records of past pigeon racing, it was apparent from the outset of this research that information would potentially be scarce and discontinuous.

The first ports of call were the national governing bodies of the two pastimes, the National Pigeon Association (originally the Pigeon Club) and the Royal Pigeon Racing Association (originally the National Homing Union). They confirmed, however, that their administrative records do not extend far enough back to explore their formation and early histories: any records and documents that may have once existed had been lost or thrown away due to lack of space. As a result, there is no complete record of fancy pigeon and long-distance racing societies in Britain before World War Two. With James Secord's (1981) 'social locations of knowledge' in mind, appeals for information were placed in modern-day issues of the two newspapers used in the research – *The Feathered World* and *The Racing Pigeon* – reaching out to clubs and individuals. However, whilst pigeon fanciers were eager and helpful, none had – or knew of – any useful historical records.

Interestingly, in 1911, President of the Marking Conference Mr Palgrave Page (see Chapter 4) had identified similar concerns. Fancy pigeon clubs, he explained, could rarely afford to have their records published and, thus, they were lost. Whilst searching the archives of the prestigious National Peristeronic Society, he admitted:

“it was my original intention to compile something like a complete record of the events that led up to its inauguration. I, however, found the material available to be insufficient, many of the minutes, though no doubt ample for their original purpose, being so very brief as to cause frequent breaks in several of the threads which I was desirous of weaving into one harmonious whole. I had therefore to content myself with

blending together, as closely as the material at my disposal would permit, a selection of items" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1167):685)).

This account from an early-twentieth century pigeon fancier could, in fact, have come from a twenty-first century archival researcher, so similar are his claims to those made by historical geographers today. Indeed, as Gagen et al. (2007:5) explain, "the passage of time erodes the 'presence' of past performances", whilst Ogborn (2010:91) clarifies that "not everything that happens leaves a record...not every record that is made survives". Thus, Lorimer (2003:200) advocates the piecing together of 'small stories' from a "constellation" of historical sources to overcome the challenges of such fragmentary records. Historical research on animals, he recommends, should use multiple sources, encouraging flexibility and improvisation to tackle scarcity of information, what he terms a "make-do-method" (Lorimer, 2006:497).

With no administrative records available from the governing bodies or clubs, this thesis primarily uses past copies of two pigeon newspapers, *The Feathered World* and *The Racing Pigeon*, and is the only study – of which I am aware – to scrutinise these sources so closely. This material has also been supported by books published by pigeon fanciers, documents from formal railway archives, and some more ephemeral items such as stud books and collectors' cards.

3.1 Pigeon Publications

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as well as occasional features in *The Cottage Gardener* and *The Field*, there were a variety of specialist newspapers and journals available to pigeon fanciers. One of the first known publications to feature pigeons was poultry fancier Lewis Wright's *Fanciers' Gazette* (est. 1874). The paper included, amongst other animals, fancy poultry, utility poultry, fancy pigeons, racing pigeons, cage-birds, dogs, cats, rabbits, and, from 1875 to 1886, livestock such as horses. In 1897, the paper was bought by 'The Fanciers' Newspaper and General Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd.', moving from London to Idle, and changed its name to *Fanciers' Gazette and Homing World*. One year later, due to the popularity of both sections, the paper split into two: *Fanciers' Gazette* – which became *Poultry World* in the early-twentieth

century – and *Homing World* – which joined with *The Homing News* (est. 1889) in 1905 to form *The Homing Pigeon*.

Due to the array of titles, this research chose to use just two newspapers in order to facilitate detailed consideration of a longer time period, *The Feathered World* (est. 1889) and *The Racing Pigeon* (est. 1898). Whilst not the first to be established, they are, as far as can be identified, the longest continually-running newspapers to feature pigeons – both still in existence today – and were associated with some important figures in the Fancy. Their continuous publication meant that a sample was taken (Appendix 1), combining both random and systematic selection. Starting at the beginning of each paper, a few years were initially chosen at random, but as more volumes were read, the newspapers guided the research: trails could be followed, events looked up, and temporal changes identified.

The literature on using newspapers emphasises caution, such “cultural artefacts” mediated by the (sub)cultures that they represent (Clark, 2005:58). The newspapers used in this research, then, whilst telling an arguably rich and detailed story from within the pastimes, tell only one side, thus shaping the research. The pigeon press mobilised and promoted certain views on pigeon fancying, constructing ‘ways of seeing’ (Berger, 1972), and helping to co-produce, govern, and frame the pastimes. These sources were political, not in militant terms, but in justifying authority and reconfiguring spatial and temporal relations. The newspapers, then, tell valuable and yet partial stories, potential bias coming from the subjective and sometimes political nature of newspaper editing, whether consciously excluding or including certain views, or unconsciously framing the pastimes in a certain way. As the National Homing Union complained, for instance, Union reports in the press were “cut...all to pieces” by editors (*RP*, 1899 (2(55):278)).

Original copies of past editions of *The Feathered World* and *The Racing Pigeon* were accessed at the British Library. Initially, the research process was very time-consuming, the Library prohibiting photography in its reading rooms. A turning point in this research, then, was the Library’s decision to allow photography in late-2014 and, subsequently, more volumes of the two papers could be read. Following this, data collection at the Library primarily took the

form of photographing newspapers to be read – and re-read – later, allowing a more thorough consideration of their content. Lorimer (2010:256), however, has cautioned that this detached way of engaging with historical material can produce a “personally-compiled version of the archive”. This was admittedly a necessary evil of this research, the most time- and cost-efficient way of gathering information. In the abstraction of material and the creation of samples, this thesis, too, constructs a ‘way of seeing’ these pastimes. Thus, it does not claim to tell a comprehensive or definitive history of pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing. Rather, it draws together and juxtaposes material from a variety of sources, providing a glimpse into these pigeon pastimes primarily through the lens of *The Feathered World* and *The Racing Pigeon*, illustrating how the pigeon press helped co-produce the pastimes. Whilst focusing on only two newspapers could be considered problematically narrow, this thesis demonstrates how detailed scrutiny of limited sources can tell us something much bigger about the history of pigeon fancying.

3.1.1 The Feathered World (est. 1889)

The Feathered World – featuring ducks, cage-birds, fancy poultry, utility poultry, wild birds, fancy pigeons, and racing pigeons – devoted at least half of its pages to fancy pigeons each week (fig. 3.1). The paper claimed to be ‘the world’s leading poultry and pigeon journal’ and one of the most widely circulated weekly publications amongst pigeon fanciers.

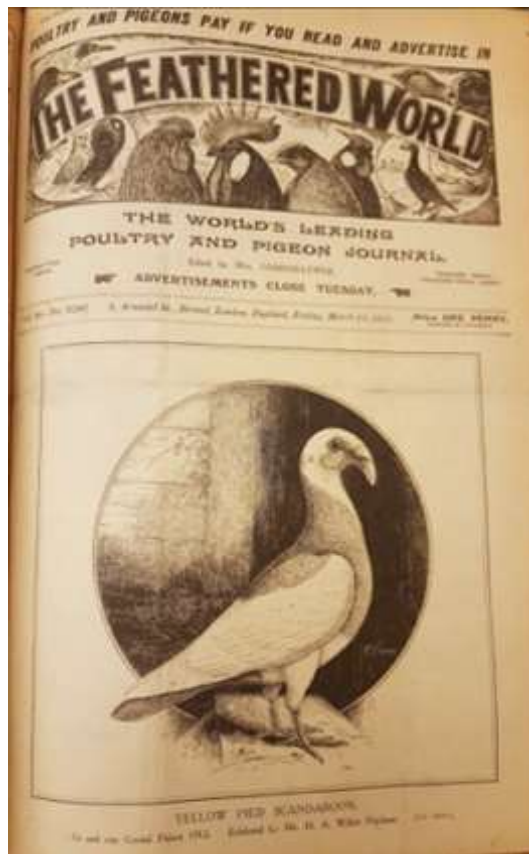


Figure 3.1: Example cover of 'The Feathered World', 1913

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (48(1240):cover

The Feathered World contained articles advising fanciers how to breed, care for, and prepare their fancy pigeons; features on successful fanciers, their lofts, and their birds; show reports and results; adverts for shows, products, appliances, and birds; and fanciers' letters, sketches, and photographs. There were also relatively regular features on racing pigeons, Mr W.H. Robson – a correspondent for *The Racing Pigeon* – contributing a monthly 'Homing Notes' under the pen-name 'Clayfield' from the 1910s, and 'Dodge' contributing 'Racing Homer Notes' monthly from the late 1920s. The paper also contained adverts for *human* products aimed at fanciers' health, beauty, and leisure, including well-known brands such as Cadbury's Chocolate, Birds' Custard, and Pear's Soap.

The paper's proprietor, Alexander Comyns, was a poultry fancier, enlisting the help of respected pigeon fanciers closely connected with the pastime's governing body – the Pigeon Club – such as Reverend W.F. Lumley, Mr Cresswell, and Mr Fellowes (see Chapters 4 and 5). It was published at *The Feathered World's*

offices in London (9 Arundle Street, Strand, W.C.2), and printed by Wyman and Sons until 1935, when Oldhams Press Ltd. took over. Published every Friday, it cost 1d. per issue, increasing to 2d. after World War One. The paper continued publication throughout the War, but missed two issues during the 1926 General Strike due to strikes by printers, the postal service, and coal workers, “the first time there...[had] been a break in the regular weekly issue of *The Feathered World*” (*FW*, 1926 (75(1924-6):735)).

The paper was a family venture, Mr Comyns’ wife – and later children – taking over after his sudden death, only a year after the paper had been established. In 1896, Mrs Comyns married pigeon and poultry fancier Mr. S.H. Lewer – becoming Mrs Comyns-Lewer – and continued, with Mr Lewer, as proprietor and editor. The paper grew in both circulation and content, earning, as one fancier suggested, “world-famed renown” (*FW*, 1898 (18(461):745)). *The Feathered World* did not publish its circulation figures every year, and there is no way of knowing the proportion of readers who were *pigeon* fanciers, as opposed to other fancy birds. The figures available show that between March 1890 and January 1896 weekly circulation tripled (fig. 3.2). On March 12th 1898, Mrs Comyns-Lewer held a dinner at The Freemason’s Tavern to commemorate the weekly circulation of her paper surpassing 50,000, reportedly “an achievement unequalled...in the history of Fancy journalism” (*FW*, 1898 (18(457):ii)). To put this into context, Nevett (1982) estimates that, at this time, *The Daily Telegraph*’s circulation surpassed this total every day. However, newspaper circulation figures at this time, Nevett (1982) explains, were often inaccurate or impossible to ascertain, and, with each copy being read and shared much more widely, circulation figures are a poor proxy for readership.

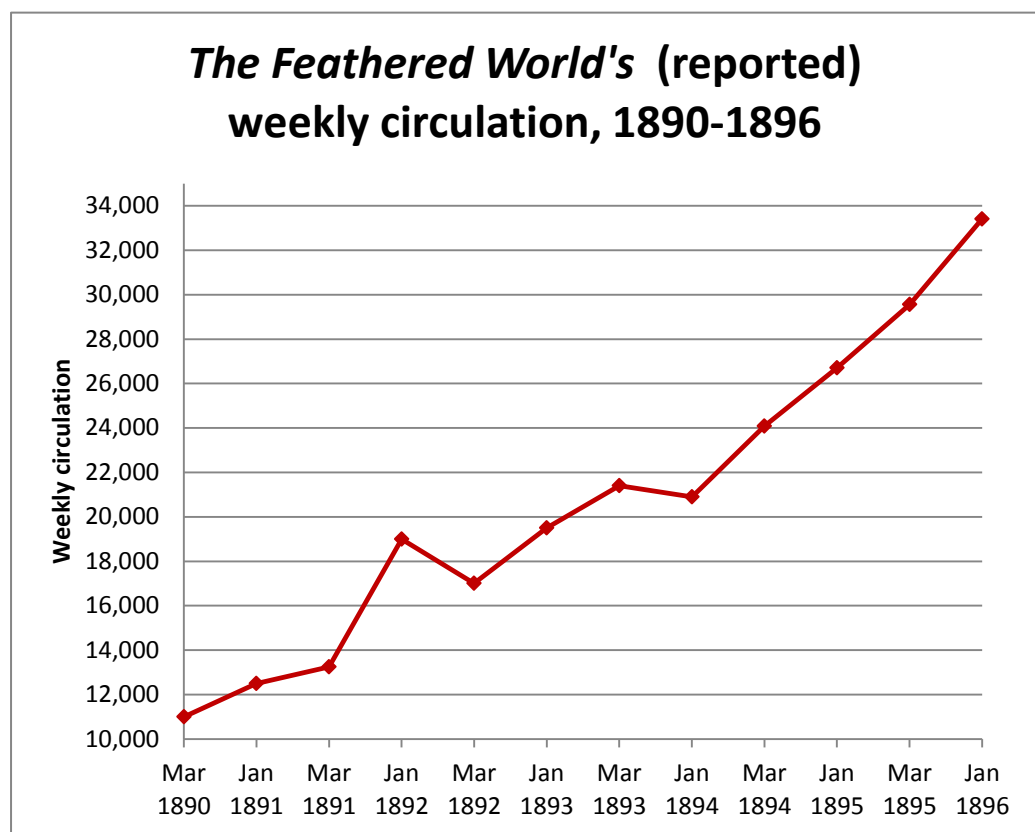


Figure 3.2: *'The Feathered World's' (reported) weekly circulation, 1890-1896*

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1890-1896

In the paper's 1000th issue (August 21st 1908), Mrs Comyns-Lewer remarked on its continued success. She claimed impartiality in balancing its content, providing correspondence between rival fanciers, helping novices, critically reporting on shows, and suggesting changes within the Fancy. Whilst the paper's columns often facilitated debate between opposing views, the objectivity of the paper cannot be taken for granted. Chapter 4 reveals, for instance, a rift between Mrs Comyns-Lewer and controversial Pigeon Club member Reverend Lumley, who, in 1897, accused *The Feathered World* of censoring his letters. In order to illustrate how newspapers can construct certain views, Chapter 4 also includes versions of the debate from *The Fanciers' Gazette and Homing World* (1897, Vol. 13).

In the late 1920s, *The Feathered World* shifted its focus from fancy and exhibition birds to profitable poultry breeding for eggs and meat in post-war Britain. As a result, coverage of pigeon fancying declined to only about a fifth of the paper's content. Some fanciers, however, also suggested that there was a "suicidal

lethargy” and apparent disinterest amongst pigeon fanciers in using the press to publicise and communicate (*FW*, 1925 (73(1886):191)). Another stated that “owing to the woeful apathy of pigeon men in advertising”, the pigeon section of the paper “was a very heavy annual financial loss...only maintained out of pure sentiment” (*FW*, 1927 (77(2005):814)). Thus, Mrs Coymns-Lewer and Mr Lewer were referred to as “philanthropists as far as pigeons were concerned” (*FW*, 1927 (77(2005):814)). By 1927, the paper’s front covers advertised it as ‘the world’s leading poultry journal’, and, from 1930, the paper incorporated *The Poultry News*. In the 1930s, *The Feathered World* became a limited company and, on November 19th 1937 (issue no.2526), the paper finally changed its name to *The Feathered World and Poultry Farmer*. By 1939, its regular features included ‘Market Intelligence’, ‘Poultry Keeper’s Advisory Bureau and Clinic’, ‘Exhibition Breeder’s News and Views’, and ‘Aviary Page’, pigeons featuring only in the latter and sharing just one page with all cage-birds.

3.1.2 The Racing Pigeon (est.1898)

The sport of long-distance pigeon racing was “well served by an enterprising press” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2304):4)), receiving coverage in local press, national newspapers (e.g. *The News of the World*), fancy journals, and pigeon racing newspapers. According to Ditcher (1991:97), “none were as successful” as *The Racing Pigeon* (est. 1898) – the paper chosen for this thesis – which was founded and edited by Alfred Osman and John Logan, two figures who made significant contributions to British long-distance pigeon racing (see Chapter 6). The paper was established as a limited company – ‘The Racing Pigeon Co. Ltd.’ – in 1898, with Logan as Chairman and Osman as Secretary. Amongst its directors were racers associated with the sport’s governing body – the National Homing Union – and the prestigious National Flying Club, such as Mr Romer, Mr Schreiber, Dr. Barker, and Mr Thoroughgood (see Chapters 6 and 7).

The first issue of *The Racing Pigeon* was advertised in *The Feathered World* (fig. 3.3) as “the brightest and very best Racing Pigeon Paper ever published” (*FW*, 1898 (18(460):707)). In its first issue (Wednesday April 20th, 1898), the opening editorial wrote: “the enormous growth of the Racing pigeon fancy during the past ten years, and its ever increasing popularity, convinces us that there is room for this journal” (*RP*, 1898 (1(1):5)). The paper (fig. 3.4) featured regular columns

giving advice about breeding and training; features on successful racers and their birds; race results and club reports; adverts for races, birds, pigeon food and appliances, and *human* health products; and racers' letters and photographs. Its aim was to promote long-distance pigeon racing, providing racers with "an organ that appealed to them and educated them in all matters appertaining to the sport" (*RP*, 1927 (46(2394):1)).

APR 11, 1898. THE FEATHERED WORLD. 307

The RACING PIGEON

The **Racing Pigeon** will be exclusively devoted to Pigeon Racers.

Mind you secure a copy of No. 1, Next Wednesday, the 20th.

The **Racing Pigeon** will contain smart up-to-date news all about Pigeon Racing.

**FLYING CLUB GATHERINGS,
NOTICES OF MEETINGS,
And RACE RESULTS**
WILL BE PROMPTLY GIVEN.

The **Racing Pigeon** will be the very brightest and best Racing Pigeon Paper ever published.

No. 1 NEXT WEDNESDAY

Will contain Splendid Illustrations of the most famous lofts in the United Kingdom.

An Article specially written by the Champion of Belgium, the most famous Pigeon Racer in the World.

DR. SQUILLS WILL ALSO GIVE A DOSE OF HIS NOTED FOOD FOR NOVICES.

Don't miss No. 1, or you will lose a treat.

ORDER "THE RACING PIGEON" AT ONCE.
EVERY WEDNESDAY. PRICE ONE PENNY.

Published by GEORGE NEWNES, Ltd., 7-12, Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.

Figure 3.3: Advert for 'The Racing Pigeon' in 'The Feathered World', 1898

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1898 (18(460):707)



Figure 3.4: Example cover of 'The Racing Pigeon', 1911
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1911 (26(1304):cover)

The Racing Pigeon was started in a small office in Temple Chambers near Victoria Embankment, where it was printed by the Racing Pigeon Publishing Company Ltd., moving to a larger office in Doughty Street, about a mile away, by 1908. After World War One, it was printed by J.G. Hammond and Co., and, from 1929, by The Cornwall Press. The paper was published by George Newnes Publishers, a pioneering commercial publisher who also produced, amongst other titles, *Tit-Bits* (1881), *Woman's Life* (1895), and *Country Life* (1897) (Cox and Mowatt, 2014). The paper – costing 1d. – was published every Wednesday, although, from the turn of the twentieth century up until World War One, a Saturday issue was also published due to the increasing volume of the paper's content. The Racing Pigeon Publishing Co. took over publishing during World War One, and the post-war price of the paper doubled to 2d. per issue, reportedly following pressure from newsagents due to rising costs of production and paper. Whilst the paper's

circulation was unbroken throughout the War, the 1926 General Strike halted production and circulation for two weeks in May. The paper was sold “at all central Railway Stations by Messrs. W.H. Smith & Son, and by local Newsvenders” (*RP*, 1899 (3(99):430)). Indeed, railways provided publishers with “a potential national market”, W.H. Smith capturing the monopoly of newspaper sales in late-nineteenth century-London (Cox and Mowatt, 2014:14).

The first issue of *The Racing Pigeon* reportedly sold 12,000 copies on the first day and a further 3,500 throughout the week. Whilst circulation figures were not regularly published, in 1920, the paper guaranteed that over 20,000 copies were sold each week, an average which increased to over 30,000 in 1922 and over 37,000 in 1923. Osman, however, stressed the mobile and transitory nature of newspapers, stating that circulation figures did “not nearly indicate the total number of readers...copies...taken by clubs and read by many members not direct subscribers” (*RP*, 1923 (42(2114):284)). In 1923, the paper’s 25th year, circulation figures were published weekly, January-April – the breeding and training season – and August-September – the end of the racing season. By calculating monthly averages, seasonal variations are revealed, circulation increasing in the approach to the beginning of the racing season (May-September) (fig. 3.5).

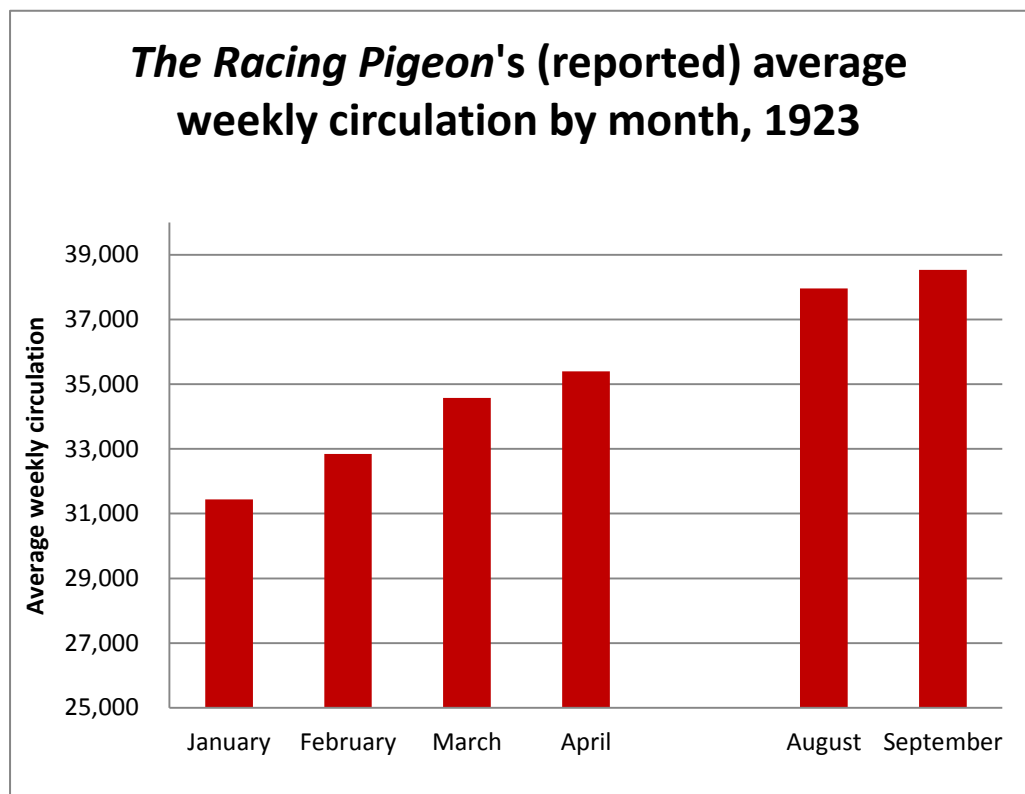


Figure 3.5: 'The Racing Pigeon's' (reported) average weekly circulation by month, 1923

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1923

After Alfred Osman's death in 1930, his son, Major W.H. Osman, took over the paper. By now, the paper's average weekly circulation had reportedly decreased to just over 31,000, although Major Osman claimed that *The Racing Pigeon* was "the leading paper in the sport", with the largest circulation of any racing pigeon paper (*RP*, 1930 (51(2468):130)). The nature of newspaper journalism, however, accommodated a certain amount of self-promotion and boosterism. Indeed, in 1913, Mr W. Crow claimed that his newspaper, *The Homing Pigeon* (est. 1905), was the paper to which "all credit is due" for the progress of long-distance racing (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1913:2).

3.1.3 Books

This research also used a selection of books written by pigeon fanciers during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This added detail to the stories told by *The Feathered World* and *The Racing Pigeon*, and helped substantiate their claims. The purpose of these books was to instruct and advise fanciers in the breeding, care, training, and preparation of their birds, explaining the particulars of the

pastimes. The books used in this research were chosen from wider reading, by searching the British Library catalogue, and also from adverts and articles in the two newspapers. Some books were read at the British Library, others were purchased second-hand, and the rarest books were obtained as PDF versions on CDs.

3.2 Railway Archives

The growth of British pigeon fancying throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was closely linked to the growth of railways, trains being used to take birds to shows and races (see Chapters 4 and 6). Other potentially useful sources of information about these pastimes, then, are railway archives. This thesis uses the national archives held at the National Railway Museum (NRM) in York (Appendix 2) and one example of a regional archive prior to the 1923 'grouping' of railway companies. For ease of access, but also a regularly-used company by pigeon racers, the archives of the Midland Railway Company (MRC) in Derby were used (Appendix 3). The MRC's lines linked the northwest, the southwest, the Midlands, and London, areas comprising major centres for early pigeon fancying (see Chapters 4 and 6).

In the NRM archives, references to pigeons were found in internally-circulated documents relating to railway affairs and diagrams of van designs, as well as past copies of staff railway magazines. The archive's online catalogue significantly eased the search and pre-ordering items saved time. However, the ability of the search engine to locate these sources depended upon the ways in which each item had originally been coded in the archive. As a result, there may be other references to pigeons hidden within the archive, concealed by the archive's size and the modern use of computerised cataloguing.

In contrast, the MRC archives in Derby are more informal, allowing researchers to play a more active role in the search for material and sort through the archive contents. Indeed, the process of using archives is framed by some literature as very 'active', as a practice, performance, or encounter (Rose, 2000; Lorimer, 2003; Dwyer and Davies, 2010; Lorimer, 2010). The sources encountered here included staff circulars, tickets, and timetables, all originally for railway use. Whilst items were pre-ordered, the relatively small size of the archive allowed

more flexibility, the knowledgeable staff making suggestions and locating additional items on the day. Formerly a private collection, the archive is, however, by no means a complete history of the MRC, the staff emphasising its transient nature. It was, they admitted, very much up to chance whether items had been saved initially, thrown away subsequently, or even whether they could be found again in the partially disordered archive. Such disorder is, however, not always undesirable (Law, 2004; Lorimer and Philo, 2009), strict classification or cataloguing creating a false sense of stability (Kurtz, 2001) and affecting interpretation of sources. As Baker (1997) has warned, interpretations of historical sources should never aim to make the past appear stable or fixed. The MRC archive is constantly growing as more items are donated, continually 'in-the-making', 'lively', or 'mobile' (Dwyer and Davies, 2010). Thus, some archival research is never 'complete', the archive actively (re)shaping research findings.

3.3 Ephemera on eBay

Twenty-first century geographers have begun to redefine both the archive and the researcher. The internet, DeLyser et al. (2004:773) argue, can "open doors to the private collections of others, not normally accessible to the researcher", making "previously unreachable collectors" accessible (DeLyser, 2015:212). Online auction and shopping website eBay has become a useful tool for historical geographers in search of "one-of-a-kind ethnographic object[s]", accumulating and collecting their own alternative 'archives' (DeLyser et al., 2004:765), what Lorimer (2010:260) calls "collections of bits and pieces". Whilst "crude accumulation" cannot be considered an efficient research method, Lorimer (2010:260) argues, some of the passion, curiosity, and interest associated with the process of collection can be beneficial. As DeLyser (2015) has suggested, collecting transforms both the research and the archive, relocating the archive to the home or office and merging it with researchers' personal lives.

Attention was first drawn to the potential of eBay as a research tool for this thesis when searching for second-hand books. Amongst the website's 'suggestions' were other collectible pigeon-related items, such as collectors' cards, annuals, and stud books. The message function on eBay facilitated conversations with sellers, enabling more information to be ascertained about the items, locate other potentially relevant sources, and find other sellers. There is, however, also an

element of luck or chance involved in finding some of eBay's hidden gems. DeLyser et al. (2004:769) warn that useful and interesting items sometimes "lie hidden within the subtext of two or three lines of item description". Furthermore, differing uses or meanings of items can make them hard to locate. A collection of letters used in this research, for instance, was mainly being marketed at stamp collectors. This emphasises the transient nature of the items, their meanings diverse and culturally-constructed, or, as Appadurai (1986) would argue, their 'social lives' or 'biographies' constantly changing as they changed ownership and purpose. The multifarious nature of their meaning also posed a further problem. With the 'value' of an item varying depending on its use, the monetary 'value' of an item to a researcher is not necessarily as high as the 'value' construed by collectors (DeLyser, 2015). This was particularly the case for some of the stud books, the often prohibitively high prices aimed at competitive collectors.

3.3.1 Annuals and Stud Books

Some of the most useful sources found using eBay were annuals and stud books (Appendix 4). The only annual for fancy pigeon exhibitors that could be located was published by *The Feathered World* and the Comyns-Lewer family. *The Feathered World Yearbook* began in 1912, containing articles on breed standards and breeding advice and directories of specialist societies and judges, although the Yearbook contained more about poultry than pigeons. Curiously, however, only two of these Yearbooks were found – 1929 and 1937 – illustrating the crucial role of eBay in actively shaping research.

Pigeon racing annuals and stud books, on the other hand, were much more commonly obtainable on eBay, although a lot of them were very expensive. They contained a summary of the year's races; features on successful racers, their methods, and their birds; adverts for lofts selling birds; and pages for breeding and training records, some of which had been filled in, providing fascinating insights into the pastime. Copies of the two most commonly available racing pigeon stud books on eBay were used in this research. The first, published and printed by Alfred Osman of *The Racing Pigeon* – and, after his death, by his son – under the pen-name 'Squills', was entitled *Squills Diary, Study Book, Training Register and Almanack*. It began in 1898, reportedly "the first of its kind", aiming "to provide a book that a fancier could keep in his loft, or coat pocket, and in

which simple details could be readily entered" (*Squills Diary*, 1909:3). Costing 1s. 6d., it became an annual diary in 1901 and, from 1906, contained a national stud list detailing "practically all the famous racers known and talked about in England" (see Chapter 7) (*Squills Diary*, 1910 [pp119 in R. Osman, 1997]). The *Squills Diaries* were seemingly very popular, advance orders being taken and copies reportedly selling out, although Osman did not report the *Diary's* circulation figures. An edited book entitled *100 Years of Superstars*, published by Rick Osman in 1997, also provided a useful collection of extracts from the diaries. The second set of racing pigeon annuals used were produced by Birmingham racer Mr W. Crow and *The Homing Pigeon* newspaper. *The Homing Pigeon Annual* began in 1905, costing 1s. 6d., its contents very similar to the *Squills Diaries*, and was likely a commercial rival.

3.3.2 Collectors' Cards

Between 1908 and 1914, *The Feathered World* published a series of 40 collectors' postcards entitled *Aids to Amateurs* (fig. 3.6). The pigeon cards featured paintings by artist and fancier A.J. Simpson (see Chapter 5) of the 'ideal' specimen for the breed – rather than specific individuals – and, on the back, a description of the breed's features, advice about breeding, information about particular fanciers, or further reading. Whilst a lot of these cards were missing in the British Library, the majority of them were available relatively cheaply on eBay (Appendix 4).

As well as collectors' cards designed as teaching aids to pigeon fanciers, pigeons also featured on cigarette cards produced for *non-fanciers*, suggesting a much wider – and more positive – public interest in pigeon fancying than some accounts suggest. Originally a marketing gimmick in the late-nineteenth century, cigarette cards soon became popular collectibles in Britain (Rickards, 2000). Each series of cards had a theme of general public interest, and can be used today as windows into social history. Using eBay, three complete series of twentieth-century cigarette cards featuring pigeons (Appendix 4) were obtained. The first, *Fowls, Pigeons and Dogs* (1908), was produced by Glasgow tobacconists F & J Smith, one of the first companies to produce cigarette cards. Nine out of the fifty cards in this early set featured popular fancy pigeon breeds, detailing their characteristics and history on the back. The second set, entitled *Pigeons* (1926), was produced by Cope Bros. & Co. in Liverpool, and featured twenty-five common fancy breeds, including information about their features and breeding. The third set, produced by Ogdens – one of the first and largest companies to produce cigarette cards – was entitled *Racing Pigeons* (1931), and comprised fifty cards describing logistical aspects of the pastime, such as lofts, clocks, and rings, as well as detailing examples of successful birds. Cigarette cards, then, represented these pigeon pastimes beyond the enthusiasts, reaching the general public. The language and information used on the cards to explain the pastimes to the public was very similar to fanciers' accounts in books and the press. However, the cards framed the pastimes in a select way. They did not, for instance, mention any of the controversial, fraudulent, and potentially cruel practices that, as this thesis explains, took place 'backstage' at shows and races. Appendix 4 lists, for reference, the complete collections of these cigarette cards featuring pigeons, in order to illustrate the topics covered.

3.3.3 Ethnographic Items

DeLyser et al. (2004:765) argue that eBay is particularly useful for finding "one-of-a-kind ethnographic object[s]". These are eBay's hidden secrets, items that you would not expect to find and which would have been hard to search for intentionally. For instance, eBay enabled the discovery of a rare catalogue produced by esteemed pigeon racer Mr Thoroughgood (1907) entitled *Sefton Loft Particulars of Homing Pigeons*, which advertised the racing pigeons for sale at his loft (see Chapter 7). It is a useful example of the process of selling and valuing

racing birds, and shows the close links between pigeons and their owners' identities. Some of the items found on eBay are truly unique, one-of-a-kind items, telling intimate and personal biographies. One such item used in this research was a series of thirteen letters to a fancier in Wigan called Mr William Gregory, between 1898 and 1901 (fig. 3.7; Appendix 4). As already mentioned, these were being sold for the stamps on the envelopes but, inside, they contained letters from his dispersed correspondents, providing an insight into the process of buying and selling fancy pigeons. The letters were replies from buyers in response to Mr Gregory's adverts, examples of which were found in *The Feathered World* (fig. 3.8), as well as responses from sellers answering Mr Gregory's queries. Mr Gregory used the pigeon press as a means of communicating with fanciers and a tool for selling breeds such as African Owls, Magpies, and Tumblers. Little more is known about him, although the relatively low prices that he charged suggest that he was not a commercial breeder. Whilst the collection of letters is only small and covers a short and discontinuous time period, it provides a valuable glimpse into the social world of fancy pigeon exhibiting.



Figure 3.7: Mr William Gregory's letters, 1898-1901

Source: Own photography

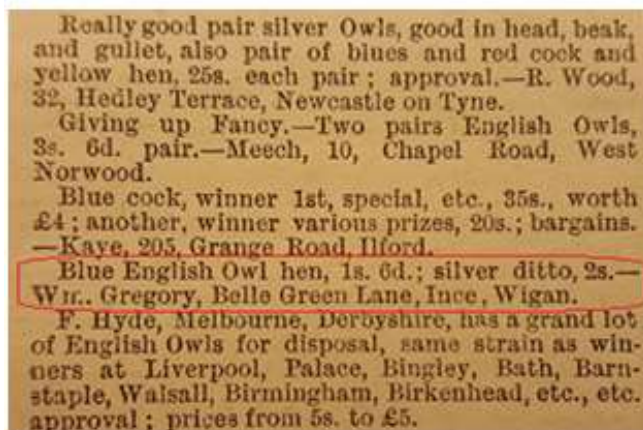


Figure 3.8: One of Mr Gregory's adverts in 'The Feathered World', 1900

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1900 (22(553):200)

3.4 Conclusion

This research weaves together a variety of threads, addressing the discontinuity and fragmentation in historical records of pigeon fancying. Drawing on interesting case studies, recurring themes, and important events – largely framed by *The Feathered World* and *The Racing Pigeon* – it traces the dynamics of fancier-pigeon encounters in pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing. These stories were not static, and, therefore, as Buller (2014b:379) states, we can only ever have “emergent knowing of non-humans”. Fudge (2002:2) argues that animals in historical sources are “absent-presences: there, but not speaking”. As the following chapters will show, fanciers were ever-present in discussions about their birds, struggles for human status and identity underpinning these pigeon pastimes. These sources reflect this, each creating a way of seeing or understanding the pastimes. Fancy and racing pigeons’ stories are, therefore, complexly entangled with those of pigeon fanciers. This thesis does not try to untangle or detach these, but, instead, looks at the processes by which they became so closely intertwined. Only then can we begin to fully interpret the human-animal dynamics underpinning pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing.

Chapter 4 Putting on a Show: The Social World of Pigeon Exhibition

Extensive stilt-like legs, majestic feather formations, wonderfully fanned tails, grand protruding chests, and mesmerising colours; fancy pigeon breeds were carefully bred for diverse and peculiar aesthetic fancies. In *Pigeons and All About Them*, pigeon fancier C.A. House (1920:xiv) identified three main reasons why people had kept and exhibited pigeons since at least the seventeenth century:

“some desire to add to their incomes, some seek pleasure and relaxation from the cares of business, and some to while away the time and give them zest and interest in life”.

By the late-nineteenth century, one exhibitor told, “pre-arranged competitions on a small scale began to fashion themselves, leading up eventually to well organised, systematic competitive exhibitions” and, as the pastime expanded, governing bodies were formed to control and standardise pigeon exhibitions (*FW*, 1908 (39(1000):250)). This chapter will explore the social world of fancy pigeon exhibition, providing a glimpse into the people, clubs, and bodies that structured the pastime. It was through this social organisation of exhibitions that fanciers and pigeons were drawn together, their encounters were shaped, and their identities were formed. Fancy pigeons became social currency, accumulations that defined their fanciers’ reputations amongst the Fancy, but were also inextricably joined to their fanciers, their identities co-produced amidst both human and avian contests. The space of the showroom was the arena in which these identities were mapped out, performed, and (re)produced; a space of encounter, performance, and display.

4.1 The Pigeon Exhibitors

Testimonies from fanciers in books and *The Feathered World* emphasised the pastime’s popularity amongst the working classes (fig. 4.1), one writing: “in numbers the working men...practically rule the roost” (*FW*, 1896 (14(351):411)). Most claimed that this was due to the pastime’s affordability and convenience, involving a “minimum amount of trouble and labour” and being adaptable to suit

individual circumstances (*FW*, 1911 (45(1163):497)). Indeed, fanciers, it seems, took pride in their pastime's working-class cohort (Lucas, 1886; Ure, 1886), naturalist and fancier George Ure (1886:69) claiming that "many of the most skilful, honest, and pleasant fanciers...have been working-men". *The Feathered World* featured occasional articles and more frequent letters discussing and celebrating working-class exhibitors. An article in 1908, for instance, reported the successes of Mr Dumbleton, a farm labourer and "genuine working-class man", who worked twelve-hour days, earning just over 15s. a week (*FW*, 1908 (38(980):667)). The article described his home-made loft "built in a small back garden" and emphasised that, due to his work, he "attend[ed] to them in the evening" (*FW*, 1908 (38(980):667)). "He has to pay house rent and keep a wife and child before a penny can be spared for his hobby", the article wrote, admiring the "perseverance and steadiness" of all working-class pigeon exhibitors (*FW*, 1908 (38(980):667)).



Figure 4.1: "Mr H. Walley's pigeon loft", picture accompanying article on his experiences as a working-class fancier, 1908

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1908 (39(1000:261)

There were, however, "two 'forged iron' limitations" faced by working-class pigeon exhibitors: "space and cost" (*FW*, 1909 (40(1033):782)). For most, their small houses, typically without gardens, prohibited them from keeping a large number of birds. Their involvement in the pastime also depended upon their finances, which fluctuated with wages and corn prices. Unable to afford expensive equipment, some working-class fanciers constructed their own lofts and "home-made 'gadgets' thereby reducing costs – the working-man's chief consideration" (*FW*, 1933 (89(2309):419)). Time was a further concern, long

hours of work – including Saturdays – conflicting with working-class leisure, leaving little time for breeding and exhibiting fancy pigeons.

Pigeon showing was not, however, an exclusively working-class pastime, the sources used in this research challenging such an assumption. In Eaton's (1851:v) influential *Treatise*, for example, he argued that the pastime was "well adapted to the professional gentlemen of law, physic, and divinity". Furthermore, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of socially-exclusive fancy pigeon societies reserved for the middle classes (see Section 4.2) (*FW*, 1890 (2(47):345)). Indeed, the press boasted that members of such societies included doctors, lawyers, and politicians, who were able to pay the high subscription fees that distinguished these societies – and their members – from most others. The pastime could, if fanciers had the means, become a very expensive hobby, grand lofts and first-rate birds coming at a high price. However, whilst socially-exclusive societies held their own private events, working-class exhibitors came face-to-face with their middle-class counterparts at open shows, meeting, most believed, "on equal footing" (Lucas, 1886:24). House (1920:xiv) explained:

"the successful man is not always he who by reason of his wealth is able to build palatial aviaries, and fill them with the bluest of blue-blooded stock...the earnest toiler, the man of small means, yet rich in practical knowledge and experience, stands as good a chance of breeding the champion Pigeon of the year as his richer brother".

The exhibition of fancy pigeons, then, traversed social class, giving the working classes a chance of triumph and achievement that, in other social contexts, they were otherwise denied. Ultimately, what mattered in the show pen were the appearances of the birds, rather than the status and wealth of their fanciers. However, it would be naïve to assume that money did not play a part, since fanciers who were better-off would have been able to afford more – and better – birds and to keep them in more comfortable – and beneficial – conditions.

Whilst *The Feathered World* featured fanciers of all classes, *female* fanciers were rarely mentioned, suggesting that the exhibition of fancy pigeons was a predominantly male pastime. As historians argue, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, it was common for women to be excluded from leisure

activities, or their participation in them concealed. Female pigeon exhibitors did, however, exist. Indeed, one editorial in *The Feathered World* suggested that the fancy pigeon, “with its gentle, affectionate ways, its devotion and constancy to its mate, its affection for its young, and its tameness, is essentially a woman’s bird” (*FW*, 1893 (8(227):417)), whilst other fanciers argued that women had the patience and attentiveness necessary to keep some of the most ‘delicate’ breeds. There were, however, very few examples of female pigeon exhibitors featured in the paper. In a rare example, in 1930, a letter to the paper praised Mrs Meeks (fig. 4.2), who had hand-reared her Roller pigeons with “no previous experience...[nor] advice...she simply followed her own inclinations”, Birmingham fanciers reportedly seeking her wisdom (*FW*, 1930 (83(2145):156)). The accompanying photograph showed Mrs Meeks with some of her birds, the letter suggesting that she had a close and trusting relationship with her birds: “they will fly on to Mrs. Meeks’ shoulder and peck at her frock – a good reward for her patience” (*FW*, 1930 (83(2145):156)).



Figure 4.2: “Mrs Meeks, of Bradford House, Solihull, with two of her young Rollers which she reared by hand from a day old, without any previous experience”, 1930

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1930 (83(2145):156)

Nonetheless, show reports rarely specified fanciers’ genders, thus hiding the women involved. Women were almost invisible in the pigeon press, all the more interesting given that Mrs Comyns-Lewer of *The Feathered World* was herself a poultry fancier. She lamented: “I wish we could get more of our lady [pigeon]

fanciers to air their ideas in the columns of our paper” (*FW*, 1896 (14(341):54)). This gendered practice appears to have continued into the twentieth century, one fancier estimating that, in 1931, about 1% of pigeon exhibitors were women (compared to 25% of rabbit fanciers, 40-60% of dog fanciers, 75% of rat and mice fanciers, and 90% of goat fanciers). Women were, it seems, more likely to help with their husbands’ pigeons than keep their own, becoming fond of them, helping care for them, and becoming well-known amongst the Fancy. One exhibitor, for example, wrote: “I am like many good fanciers...very fortunately situated in regard to the interest my wife and family take in my hobby” (*FW*, 1931 (85(2200):228)).

Conversely, a lot of letters in *The Feathered World* about women constructed them as the fancier’s enemy, a ‘menace’. Some complained that their wives were unappreciative and unacquainted with the nuances of the pastime and the value of their birds, whilst others protested that their wives had banned them from keeping pigeons, or had forced them to give up, believing that the time and money could be better spent. Another explanation that fanciers gave was that their pastime had long been subjected to “old-fashioned prejudices” (*FW*, 1890 (3(65):193)). Lucas (1886:24) explained that, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was “an opinion...that Pigeons are ‘low’”, Ure (1886:3) adding that “superior people consider[ed] themselves above” the pastime. Some fanciers believed that this was due to the pastime’s working-class roots, the nineteenth-century characterised by a rapidly increasing middle-class population and subsequent intensification of class distinctions. Nonetheless, the popularity of pigeon fancying amongst the middle classes should, in theory, have improved the pastime’s public reputation. Other fanciers argued that the location of society meetings in public houses was to blame for prejudice against pigeon fancying. The public house became a contentious space in the nineteenth century, during which time the Temperance movement “transformed drunkenness from a personal state of excess sociability into an anti-social vice” (Shiman, 1988:2). Beginning as a middle-class movement, and later dominated by emerging working-class teetotallers, Temperance epitomised Victorian values of self-control and self-denial, framing abstinence as a way of morally ‘improving’ society (Shiman, 1988). The idea of ‘respectable’ recreation was key to middle- and working-class Victorian identity and, thus, societies such as fancy pigeon –

and, indeed racing pigeon (see Chapter 6) – clubs that met in public houses were met with criticism and suspicion.

No doubt as a result of the pastime's antagonists, *The Feathered World* sometimes featured letters from young boys asking for help in persuading their mothers to let them keep pigeons. Usually "very chary of giving away the secrets of their success", pigeon exhibitors rarely hesitated to help young and novice fanciers (*FW*, 1901 (24(603):50)), demonstrating "fraternal spirit" (*FW*, 1910 (43(1103):208)). *The Feathered World* ran schemes to encourage young fanciers, such as its 'Children's Corner' essay competition in 1891 and its 'Free Gift to Boys' competition in 1908, winners – again, usually male – receiving a pair of chickens or pigeons donated by readers. The paper's correspondent 'Jurion' formed 'The Young Fanciers' League' for young poultry and pigeon fanciers in the 1920s, running competitions and classes at shows, and donating birds to its members (fig. 4.3), and, by 1929, the League was reportedly "nearly 12,000 strong, and...growing bigger" (*The Feathered World Year Book*, 1929:152).



Figure 4.3: "Have You Sent in Your Photo Yet for 'The Young Fanciers' League' Photo Competition? This entry was sent in by Ernest Hobbs, of Chesterfield, who is seen feeding his Show Homers obtained through the help of the League"

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1927 (77(1991):234)

Fanciers, whilst not discussing at length the nature and causes of prejudices against their pastime, naturally disagreed with them. Letters to *The Feathered World* regularly discussed, instead, what fanciers believed to be the *benefits* of pigeon exhibiting. Some saw it as a "healthy pleasure in the back yard" (*FW*, 1891

(4(82)51)), which kept boys and men at home and in the fresh air, rather than at the public house drinking or gambling. Lucas (1886:20) believed that pigeon showing withdrew “the temptations of idleness”, others calling it an “elevating pursuit” (*FW*, 1890 (3(65):193)), “ennobling” (*FW*, 1890 (2(45):312)), and “an interesting and instructive hobby” (*FW*, 1908 (38(978):572)). Fanciers argued that it taught lessons in observation, perseverance, organisation, thoroughness, and discipline, Ure (1886:5) labelling the pastime “civilizing and humanizing”. “From an educational point of view”, one exhibitor wrote, “the limit is unbounded...[it] will produce to the thinking man an unlimited field of thought” (*FW*, 1911 (45(1163):497)). It was, therefore, believed that the practices of breeding, keeping, and showing fancy pigeons, could shape or even ‘improve’ a person, echoing fanciers’ desires to ‘improve’ their birds (see Chapter 5).

Whilst, unfortunately, no complete registers of pigeon fanciers were made, fanciers’ own observations in books and *The Feathered World* can help partially reconstruct the pastime’s geography. Robert Fulton (1880:386), reportedly “one of the greatest authorities on pigeons generally that ever lived” (*RP*, 1905 (14(719):457)), stated that, by 1880, “influential societies” had been established in most large urban centres, citing Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle, Glasgow, and Edinburgh – a list of predominantly northern centres. Indeed, some stated specifically that Lancashire was home to some of the earliest societies (Lyell, 1887), whilst others branded the north-east of England a ‘hub’. Newcastle was, for some, “the ‘home of the Fancy’, where...the first specialist clubs began to rise”, such as the Long-faced Almond Tumbler Club (est. 1886), closely associated with Robert Fulton (*FW*, 1914 (50(1293):711)).

Equally, however, evidence suggests that pigeon showing also had a strong following in south-east England, some of the earliest and most prestigious societies being formed in London (see Section 4.2). Many fanciers believed that you could “trace the spread of pigeon mania” from its origins in London’s Spitalfields (*FW*, 1890 (2(47):345)). Lucas (1886:34) called Spitalfields “the cradle of the Fancy”, explaining how French Huguenot immigrants, in the seventeenth century, had settled there to work in silk manufacturing, bringing with them their passion for fancy pigeons. From the early-nineteenth century, Spitalfields was home to one of London’s most famous live animal markets, Club Row, where domestic and exotic animals – including fancy pigeons – could be

bought and sold (fig. 4.4). One fancier called it “the pigeon emporium of the London Fancy” (FW, 1907(36(927):603)), Lucas (1886:41) reminiscing about “the feast of feather, form, and beauty displayed”. Club Row was “the centre of the pigeon traffic”, he argued (Lucas, 1886:42). According to Mr Daniels – a former National Peristeronic Society President who had originally kept *racing* pigeons before taking up fancy Dragoons – almost every shop on Club Row had been a prosperous bird shop where fanciers met regularly to buy birds and “discuss the properties and relative merits of their birds”, where they learnt their “first lessons in pigeonology...[and] where so many recruits to the Fancy were made” (FW, 1910 (42(1084:645)). These bird shops, then, acted as early examples of Secord’s (1981) ‘social locations of knowledge’. The late-nineteenth century growth of pigeon societies and the pigeon press, however, replaced the need for shops. Daniels explained that it was “a matter of regret that with the progress and development of the Fancy came also the ruin and disappearance of the old London pigeon shop-keepers” (FW, 1910 (42(1084:645)). Thus, by the late-nineteenth century, Lucas (1886) lamented, most bird shops in Club Row had closed down.

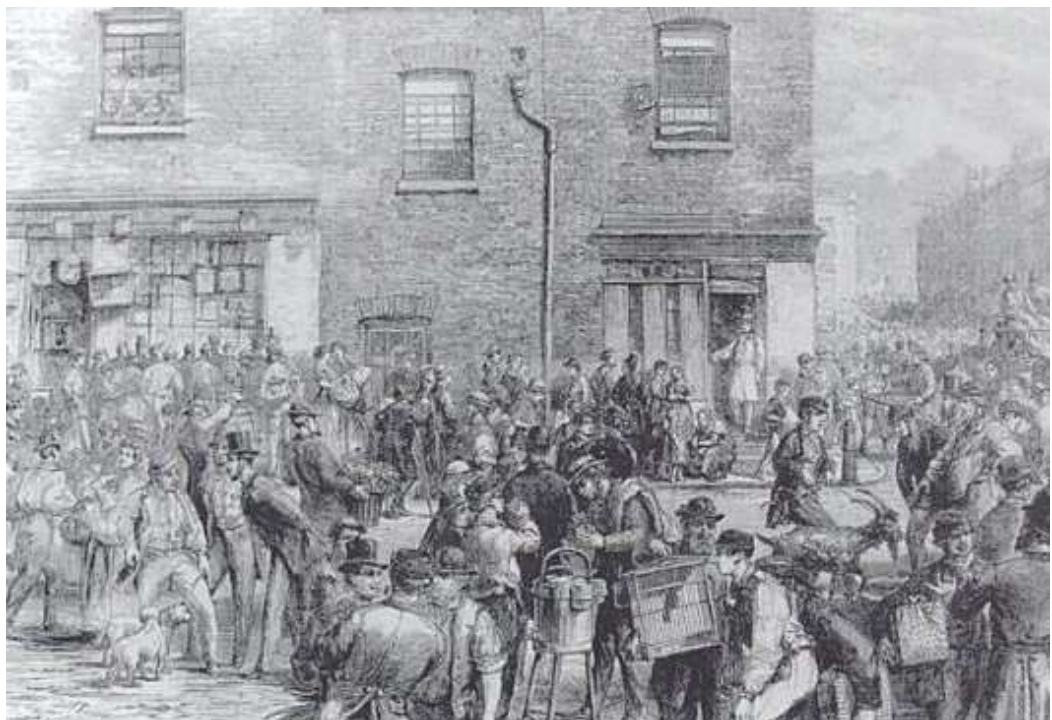


Figure 4.4: Club Row (originally printed in ‘The Illustrated Times’, 8th Aug 1868 pp89)

Source: Feeley-Harnik (2004:333)

A series of articles in *The Feathered World* entitled ‘A Few Midland Fanciers’ in 1895 and 1896 suggested that the pastime was also popular in the Midlands.

Birmingham in particular was home to some of the most active men amongst the Fancy, such as Marking Conference Secretary Mr Allsop (see Section 4.3) and artist and fancier Mr Ludlow (see Chapter 5). “The Birmingham speciality”, one fancier stated, were Rollers and Tumblers (fig. 4.5), breeds so-called for their propensity to tumble through the air (*FW*, 1895 (13(334):522)). As well as being exhibited, these breeds also competed in flying competitions – the formal organisation of which reportedly began in Birmingham in the 1920s – in which they were released in groups or ‘kits’ and judged based on their “ability to roll and spin in the highest velocity for as many varying distances as possible and in a given period of time” (Pensom, 1958:111). From fanciers’ accounts, then, there also appears to have been a geography or spatial-distribution to breeds. Some breeds, such as the Birmingham Roller, were named after the places in which they were established and, whilst these breeds soon spread nationwide, they remained very popular in their places of origin. Other examples include the London Beard, Norwich Cropper, Macclesfield Tippler, and Sheffield Tippler.

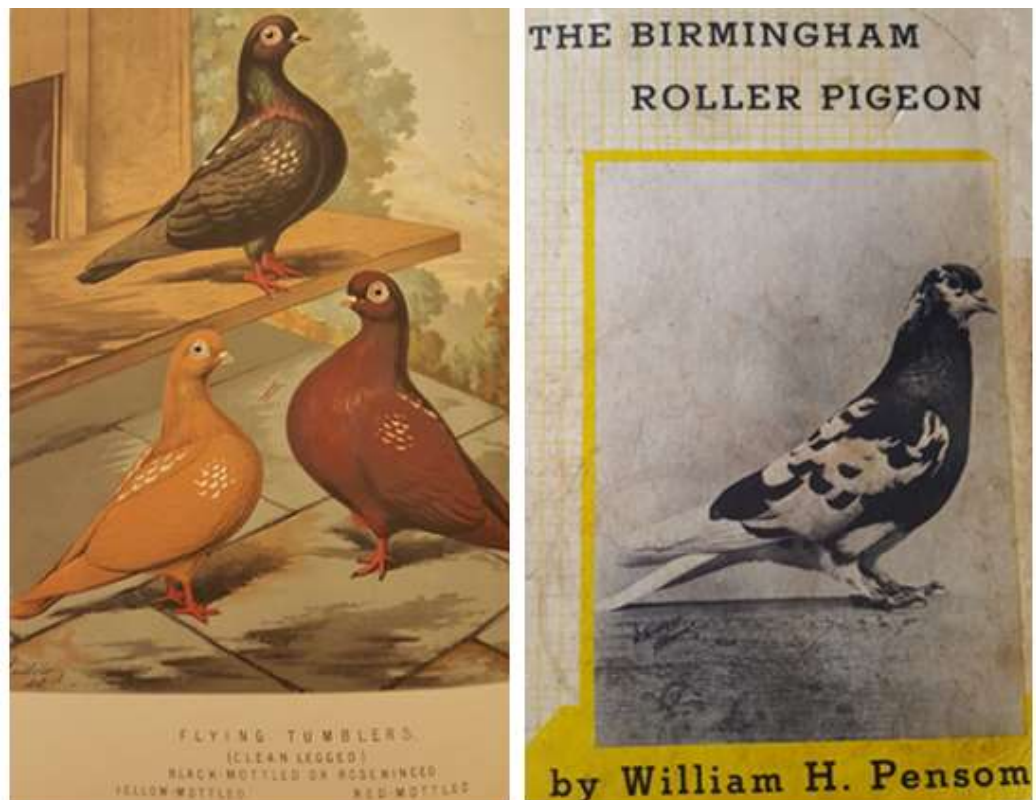


Figure 4.5: Flying Tumblers (1880) and the Birmingham Roller Pigeon (1958)

Source: Fulton (1880:plate); Pensom (1958:cover)

The geography to breed popularity, one fancier suggested, was also “partly owing...to the special suitability of the various breeds of the various localities”

(*FW*, 1889 (1(3):33)). The Tumbler varieties, for instance, according to House (1920:183) were “adapted for large towns”, since they required little space. Some believed that climate also played a part, one Newcastle fancier considering the “Northern climate too cold to successfully keep” varieties such as Dragons, Carriers, and Barbs, but better suited to Tumblers, Magpies, Jacobins, and Pouters (*FW*, 1914 (50(1296):viii)). The Almond Tumbler variety (see Chapter 5) was particularly common in Newcastle, Fulton (1880) argued, himself having kept them there. Originally “confined to a few owners in the North” in the mid-nineteenth century, one fancier wrote, Tumblers later spread to the Midlands, in the twentieth century, becoming very popular (*FW*, 1908 (39(1000):251)). Thus, the geographies of breeds, it appears, were constantly shifting. Other fanciers identified geographical trends in breeds owing to “special local development” (*FW*, 1889 (1(3):33)). Mr Woods of Mansfield, for example, was reportedly well-known amongst the Fancy for developing a specific variety of the Dragoon – sometimes referred to by its original name, ‘Dragon’ – at the end of the nineteenth century. “Whether Mansfield has made the Dragons famous,” one fancier stated, “or the Dragons made Mansfield famous, I’ll argue not” (*FW*, 1896 (15(566):23)). Some geographical trends were, alternatively, “owing to accidental circumstances” (*FW*, 1889 (1(3):33)). For example, the Huguenot weavers in Spitalfields, Lucas (1886) explained, during the early-nineteenth century, were forced to sell their pigeons – mainly Pouters (see Chapter 5) – when competition in silk manufacturing reduced their wages. The majority of these birds, most fanciers agreed, were bought by Scottish fanciers, the late-nineteenth century Scottish Pouter fancy being “built almost entirely out of the scattered and ruined lofts of the Spitalfield Weavers” (Lucas, 1886:37). As a result, Scotland became recognised as “the head centre of the [British] Pouter Fancy” (*FW*, 1908 (39(1000):251)), a Cope Bros. (1926, No.3) cigarette card explaining to non-fanciers that Pouters were “prime favourites in Scotland...termed ‘King of the Doos’”. The geographies of fancy pigeon breeds were, therefore, closely linked to the geographies of pigeon fanciers.

4.2 The Clubs

Fancy pigeon clubs or societies were, one exhibitor wrote, “a natural accompaniment to the advancement of pigeon fancying” (*FW*, 1890 (2(52):406)). Clubs facilitated the organisation of shows, bringing people and pigeons together

in increasingly competitive encounters. Fanciers could be members of as many clubs as they wished, provided they paid a subscription to each. Subscriptions varied between clubs, but were not often published in *The Feathered World*. Whilst there was no mention of subscription rates prohibiting working-class fanciers (except, of course, in the case of socially-exclusive societies), some of the examples found were relatively expensive, costing up to 5s. in the late-nineteenth century and up to 10s. in the 1930s. Likewise, society membership figures were rarely published, although fanciers' accounts suggested varying sizes, from small village clubs to larger local and national clubs.

Fancy pigeon societies can, as James Secord (1981) suggests, be interpreted as 'social locations of knowledge'. Meetings, shows, and annual dinners provided opportunity for "social intercourse", members fostering a collective identity around a common passion for pigeons (*FW*, 1890 (2(52):406)). Clubs and societies were described as 'fraternities' or 'families', fanciers uniting in friendly competition. Clubs also helped produce and disseminate knowledge about the pastime, fanciers benefitting from the "mutual interchange of views and inspections of birds" at meetings and shows (*FW*, 1890 (2(52):406)). Annual society dinners combined entertainment and instruction, presidential addresses "imparting valuable information...equally from a scientific as from a recreative point of view" (*FW*, 1907 (36(925):491)). Knowledge, it seems, acted as a form of social capital, reinforcing exhibitors' reputations within the Fancy, one fancier claiming: "knowledge is power" (*FW*, 1893 (8(204):394)).

In the late-nineteenth century, the number of fancy pigeon clubs, Fulton (1895) claimed, was growing exponentially. Although no precise figures exist, most provincial towns, and many villages, had at least one club by the turn of the twentieth century. Lyell (1887:50) explained: "before the days of railways...meetings could only take place in some large centre, near to which there were resident many breeders". The growth of clubs, then, fanciers believed, was facilitated by the growth of the railways. Pigeon clubs were "of a twofold order": local clubs "scattered over the length and breadth of the land...many of which are solely of local interest" (*FW*, 1890 (2(52):406)); and specialist clubs, drawing members nationwide, which "devote[d] their attention to advance the well-being of particular breeds" (*FW*, 1890 (2(52):407)).

Whilst the lack of records makes it impossible to accurately map the distribution of clubs, mapping a sample from adverts and reports in *The Feathered World* demonstrates the pastime's reach (fig. 4.6). Due to the large amount of shows held, it would have been impractical to map all the years or even a whole season. The sample, therefore, contains clubs that held shows during November – the height of the show season – in ten-year intervals starting in 1895. Whilst a large number of shows were reported and advertised in the paper, it must be remembered that this was by no means a comprehensive list of all club shows. Indeed, one exhibitor writing in *The Feathered World* lamented: “shows come and go without being heard of” (*FW*, 1893 (8(194):214)).

The maps (fig. 4.6) indicate the distribution of the sampled club shows, illustrating that fancy pigeon clubs were widespread and located in a range of places, from small villages and spa towns to large industrial towns (Appendix 5), thus incorporating fanciers from a wealth of different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The sample reveals a close affinity with industrial areas, concentrations of shows located in South Wales, Birmingham, Manchester, London, and north-east England. There are, however, some notable exceptions, Southampton and Portsmouth, for instance, not represented on the maps, and yet historically important ports and naval bases. There is an interesting urban-rural divide in the sample, pigeon shows generally scarce in rural areas such as Dorset, Hampshire, Shropshire, North Wales, and the Welsh border. This was potentially due to the generally small and dispersed nature of rural populations, the pastime needing significant concentrations of people in relatively small geographical areas to facilitate competition. The distribution of sampled clubs appears to have changed very little over the forty years mapped, and so too does their number. In November 1895, 200 club shows were identified, 197 in 1905, and 189 in 1925. The apparent decline in the number of clubs holding shows in November 1915 (67) can be explained by wartime restrictions – on transport, food, and money – whilst the drop in 1935 (46) may be partly due to reporting bias, the paper having decreased its fancy pigeon coverage. In addition, however, the pastime most likely faced the same interwar challenges as literature suggests led to a decline in pigeon racing at this time (Mass Observation, 1943; Mott, 1973; Johnes, 2007), such as economic depression, unemployment, decline of heavy industries, changes in leisure preferences, and strict council house tenancies (see Chapter 6).



1915



1925



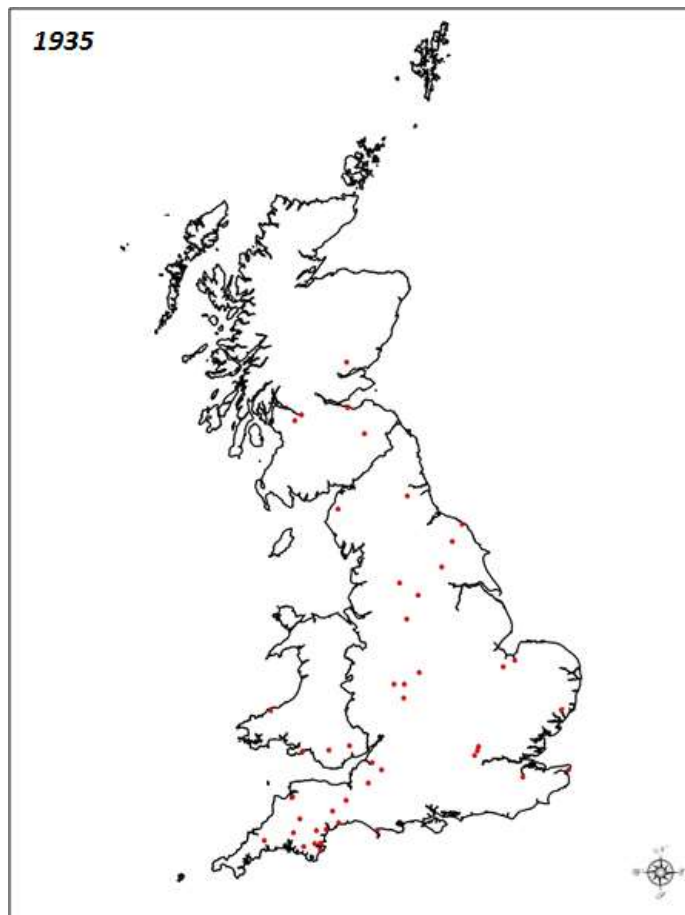


Figure 4.6: Maps showing a sample of clubs holding shows during November, 1895-1935 (omitted from the maps are Dublin and Belfast, the only clubs in the sample located across the Irish Sea)

Source: The Feathered World, 1895-1935

The first society on record, Fulton (1880) claims, was founded in 1720 at 'Jacob's Well' public house in London's Barbican. It was, however, another early London-based society to which most fanciers agreed "the principal pigeon Societies...owe[d] their parentage" – the Columbarian Society (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):491)). The Columbarian (est. 1750) met at the 'Globe' public house on Fleet Street, and was reportedly the first society to hold competitive exhibitions for money, albeit for members only and in private (Fulton, 1880). Members had to be elected, and included bankers, politicians, and other 'gentlemen' of high social positions, thus challenging claims that the pastime was predominantly working-class. The Society was primarily devoted to breeding the Almond Tumbler variety, thus, in 1825, "to satisfy the want of a club of a more general character", 'The Feather Club' was established, its meetings held at 'The Griffin' public house on Threadneedle Street (Fulton, 1895:519). "On account of its connection with the great mercantile centre of the country", Fulton (1895:519) asserts, it became known as the 'City Columbarian Society' in 1833. Again, members were elected, and included Robert Fulton and artist Dean Wolstenholme (see Chapter 5). The Society's meetings regularly changed location due to member disagreements, publicans' rents, and lack of space, eventually settling in the Raglan Hotel, a venue also used by the Pigeon Club (see Section 4.3) for meetings and dinners.

In 1847, the City Columbarian merged with the Southwark Columbarian Society to form the Philoperisteron Society. "To this society", Fulton (1880:385) argues, "must be given the credit of originating public shows of pigeons", the Society holding the nation's first show open to public visitors, in 1848. The 'Philos' met at 'The Crown and Anchor', later moving to 'The Freemason's Tavern'. This was, again, a socially exclusive society for elected men of high social – and Fancy – ranking, members including future Pigeon Club President Mr Harrison Weir, Charles Darwin, and naturalist William Tegetmeier. The "velvet waistcoats" and "posh venues of the West End" were, then, a contrast to the "rowdy beer-halls of Spitalfields" open to working-men (Desmond and Moore, 1991:429). In 1898, Tegetmeier – then Pigeon Club President – presented a caricature of himself (fig. 4.7) to the Philoperisteron Society, having served as President of the Society in 1861. Appearing as half-pigeon half-man – not the only example found of a cartoon drawn like this – Tegetmeier was depicted in a waistcoat, jacket, and real

feathered tail, his pompous chest mimicking the extravagant appearance of the prestigious and popular Pouter breed (see Chapter 5). Emphasising the high social class of the 'Philos', this cartoon also illustrated, perhaps, the extent to which pigeon fanciers and their birds could become inextricably linked and co-defined.



Figure 4.7: William Tegetmeier, 1862

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1898 (19(490):660)

Tegetmeier (1816-1912) was “an enthusiastic breeder of poultry and pigeons, both fancy and racing...the leading authority on these birds and many other aspects of natural history” (Secord, 2004[online]). As well as books on pheasants, domestic fowl, and salmon, Tegetmeier published *Pigeons: Their Structure, Varieties, Habits and Management*, in 1868, based on his own experiments and observations with both fancy and racing pigeons in his “scientific columbarium” (Richardson, 1916:58). His significant impact on pigeon racing is covered in Chapters 6 and 7, but one of his most noted contributions to the exhibition of fancy pigeons was his introduction of Charles Darwin to the Philoperisteron Society in 1855, Tegetmeier working very closely with him (Richardson, 1916). Darwin also joined the Borough Club in Spitalfields, although he was reportedly “easiest in the exclusive Philoperisteron...It had all the snobbish appeal of a Piccadilly club...an attempt to escape the grimy associations of the fancy” (Desmond and Moore, 1991:429).

In the 1850s, the National Columbarian Society formed as an offshoot of the Philoperisteron Society, the two sharing mostly the same members and, in 1868, merging to form the National Peristeronic Society (NPS), its annual show held at the prestigious Crystal Palace. The NPS promoted the production and dissemination of knowledge amongst its members, forming a library of pigeon fancying books at its headquarters and arranging for scientific papers to be read at meetings on topics including pathology and breeding. The Society then, framed pigeon exhibiting as a simultaneously social and scientific pursuit, in keeping with the general surge in interest in popular science during the nineteenth century (Boyd and McWilliam, 2007). The NPS was more than double the size of its predecessors, nearly 100 members being elected, including William Tegetmeier – President in 1873 – and other names associated with the Pigeon Club, the Marking Conference, and the National Pigeon Association, such as Mr Harrison Weir – President in 1862 and 1863 – and Mr Palgrave Page – President in 1890 and 1891 (see Section 4.3). Although it was considered a “privilege to belong to such a body”, the Society claimed to have “no class restrictions” (*FW*, 1927 (77(2005):814)). The NPS appears to have been the last of these prestigious clubs, most later societies inclusive of all social classes. Nonetheless, the NPS continued to be an active and popular society through to the present day, and now claims to be the oldest continually running fancy pigeon society in the world.

As well as clubs distinguished by geography or class, national clubs emerged in the late-nineteenth century for the advancement of specific breeds. Some fanciers specialised in one breed, whilst others kept multiple varieties, joining their respective breed societies. The first specialist club, devoted to the Turbit (see fig. 5.15), was formed in London in 1880 by a Mr Williams, Reverend Lumley – later Pigeon Club Vice-President (see Section 4.3) – serving as Secretary. The Turbit Club’s first rule stated:

“the objects of this club are to advance and encourage the scientific culture of Turbit pigeons; to promote a clearer understanding between breeders and judges as to the most desirable type; to form and tabulate an authoritative standard of properties; and to improve classification at all exhibitions” (*FW*, 1905 (32(811):3)).

Breed clubs were, therefore, a means of standardising and controlling breeding, consequently (re)defining fancy pigeon breeds.

In 1890, *The Feathered World* published a list of the fourteen existing specialist breed clubs – with the addresses of their secretaries – and, in the second edition of his book, Fulton (1895) published an updated list with five additions (Appendix 6). By 1929, *The Feathered World Year Book* recorded fifty-one breed clubs, and fifty-six in 1937 (Appendix 7). Whilst the Turbit Club was the oldest specialist club, the clubs devoted to the Show Homer breed (see fig. 5.22) were reportedly the biggest. In the early-twentieth century, the United Show Homer Club (USHC) had over 200 members and over 1,000 entries at its annual shows. There were some exhibitors, nonetheless, who criticised specialist breed clubs for being “somewhat of an evil”, condemning them for creating “fictitious” values, selling birds “at figures ten to fifty times in excess of their actual value” (*FW*, 1896 (14(345):196)). Another suggested that specialist clubs “only spoiled the breed they wanted to do so much for”, arguing that their breed-specific shows were poorly-supported compared to general shows (*FW*, 1903 (28(715):525)).

4.3 Governing Pigeon Showing

As the exhibition of fancy pigeons became increasingly popular, profitable, and correspondingly competitive, pigeon fanciers began to discuss ways to better organise the pastime. This was a political project, which aimed to restructure, categorise, and standardise practices, shaping fancier-pigeon encounters and redefining pigeon ‘beauty’. At ‘The Marking of Young Birds Conference’, held by Birmingham Columbarian Society in 1885, fanciers from most major pigeon societies reportedly gathered to discuss how to regulate competitions so that birds competed in their appropriate category. The decision was made to adopt a stamp that verified a pigeon’s age, provided by Mr Allsop of Birmingham Columbarian Society. At the meeting, two bodies were formed to govern the pastime: the Marking Conference, responsible for the marking and identification of fancy pigeons; and the Pigeon Club, responsible for overseeing breeding and exhibiting. Both had elected Committees – including a president, vice-president(s), honorary secretary, auditor(s), treasurer, and solicitor – who sought to introduce rules to standardise pigeon showing. In institutionalising the

pastime, fanciers aimed to control practices and pigeon aesthetics, subsequently restructuring ways of encountering fancy pigeons.

4.3.1 The Pigeon Club (est. 1885)

The Pigeon Club had three main objectives (fig. 4.8): to encourage the breeding and exhibition of fancy pigeons, to prevent fraud, and to protect and ‘advance’ the pastime. The Club held monthly committee meetings, holding its Annual General Meetings at major shows. Articles and meeting reports in *The Feathered World* reveal some of the Club’s key figures, including naturalist William Tegetmeier, who served as President 1898-1900. Some fanciers were elected ‘life members’ of the Club, such as Mrs Comyns-Lewer of *The Feathered World*, authors Mr Fulton and Mr Lyell, and artist Mr Ludlow. The Club’s first President was fancier and artist Mr Harrison Weir (see Chapter 5). His name was reputedly “a household word wherever fanciers assemble[d]” (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):526)), holding that position from 1889-1893, and again in 1897. His *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry states that he was “steadfast in his devotion to animal welfare”, becoming involved in the governing, judging, and breeding of fancy cats, poultry, and pigeons (Ingpen, 2004[online]).

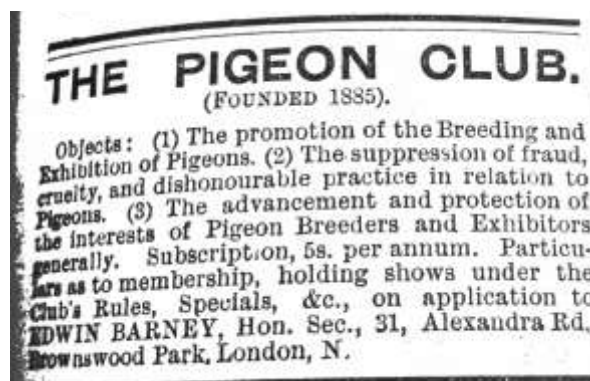


Figure 4.8: The Pigeon Club’s Objectives, 1900

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1900 (23(583):241)

Mr Harrison Weir was also a member of the Poultry Club (est.1877) – a product of Victorian ‘fowl mania’ – and was not alone in his dual membership. The two clubs, in fact, had close connections: the first Secretary of the Poultry Club, Mr Cresswell, later served as Pigeon Club President twice, and Mr Comyns of *The Feathered World* acted as Honorary Secretary of both before his sudden death. The two clubs retained strong co-operation, working together, for instance, in

lobbying railway companies for reduced fares. The Poultry Club was dubbed by pigeon fanciers as the Pigeon Club's "older sister association" (*FW*, 1896 (14(357):573)), the Pigeon Club modelling itself on its predecessor. The Poultry Club was, however, far bigger, having 1,100 members in 1896, compared to the Pigeon Club's 269.

Prevention of fraud was one of the Pigeon Club's central concerns from the outset. Mr Cresswell stated that "such a body as the Pigeon Club was much needed to protect fanciers and to punish the wrong-doers", examples of cheating ranging from entering birds into the wrong classes, to practices sparking ethical and moral concerns about the birds' welfare (see Chapter 5) (*FW*, 1891 (5(126):411)). If fair-play, standardisation, and regulation could be enforced, the value of winning – and the boost to fanciers' reputations – would be given substance, authenticity, and authority. The Club attempted to achieve this through two main acts of systemisation, publishing rules for running affiliated clubs and shows and compiling breed standards (see Chapter 5). The Pigeon Club, then, reconfigured pigeon exhibitions and fanciers' practices, redefining both fanciers and their birds.

Initially, Pigeon Club membership was on a private individual basis, members elected and paying a subscription of 5s. per annum. In 1896, the Club announced a scheme of 'affiliated societies', which would, it hoped, "place the Club on broad and representative lines" (*FW*, 1896 (15(370):113)). Societies applied for affiliation and paid an annual subscription fee, their members able to be elected as Pigeon Club 'associated members' at half the private subscription. Affiliated clubs could then hold shows affiliated to the Pigeon Club – and under the Club's rules – adding to both their prize funds and prestige. Such reorganisation, fanciers felt, had long been necessary, and was modelled on the Poultry Club's success. Nonetheless, the extent to which the Pigeon Club was truly representative of the Fancy can be contested. Whilst reporting was inconsistent in *The Feathered World* – and there are no estimates of the total number of pigeon fanciers in Britain – the available membership figures for the Pigeon Club suggest that it was not popular in its early days (fig. 4.9). Despite the growing popularity of pigeon showing reported in the press, the Club had only 116 members in 1888, increasing gradually to 269 by 1895. There were also very few affiliated clubs – 7 in 1900, increasing to 23 by 1905 – and affiliated shows – 37

in 1889, declining to 22 in 1904 (fig. 4.9). As a result, the Pigeon Club's financial position in its early years, so *The Feathered World* reported, was delicate. Nonetheless, at the Club's 1889 AGM, held at the Dairy Show, Secretary Mr Mathias praised "the growth and continued prosperity of the Pigeon Club" (*FW*, 1889 (1(15):230)), and in 1891, he referred to a "growing confidence" in the Club (*FW*, 1891 (5(126):411)).

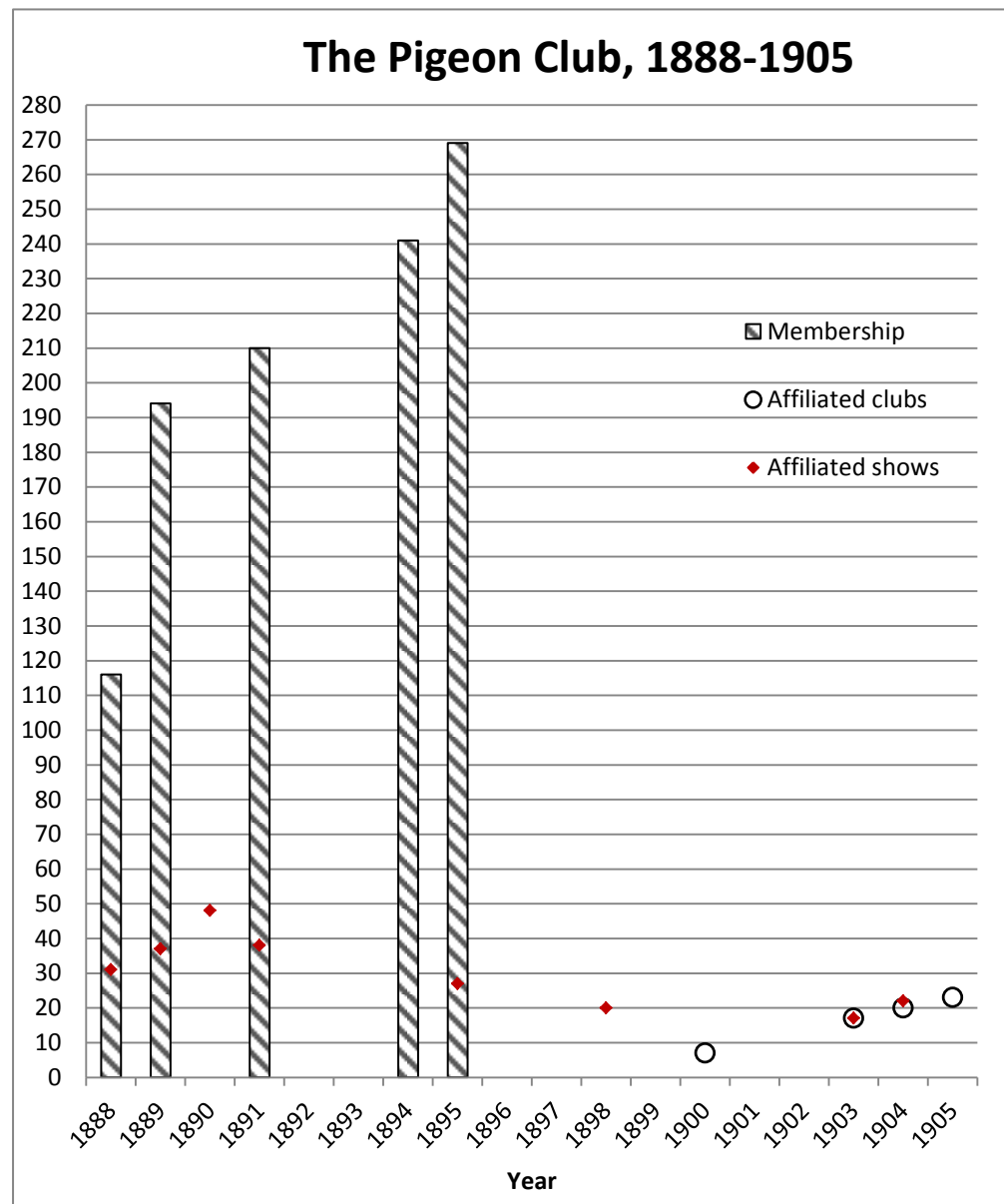


Figure 4.9: The Pigeon Club's membership, affiliated clubs, and affiliated shows, 1888-1905

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1888-1905

Despite a desire for unity, *The Feathered World* reported that the Pigeon Club was subject to criticism and opposition, describing the pigeon Fancy as "hopelessly divided" (*FW*, 1907 (36(931):780)). As a result, one fancier wrote in 1896, "the

most eminent and popular fanciers of the country so studiously keep aloof from the club" (*FW*, 1896 (14(360):652)). The Club responded in the press, calling its criticism a "persistent flood of misrepresentation" (*FW*, 1903 (28(716):570)). However, more troubling, perhaps, were disputes *within* the Club. In 1896, for instance, almost all of the Club's officers resigned following disagreements over the Club's rules on the controversial practice of 'faking' (see Chapter 5). The following year, Reverend Lumley – then Vice-President – was expelled from the Pigeon Club for his views on the contentious subject (see Chapter 5). This incident exposed an example of bias amongst *The Feathered World's* editorial team. Lumley, who had been strongly associated with the paper in its early years, felt he had been misrepresented in its pages by Mrs Comyns-Lewer. Writing in *The Fanciers' Gazette and Homing World* (*FGHW*), he accused Mrs Comyns-Lewer of unfairly attacking him, "misconstruing" his words, and censoring his letters (*FGHW*, (1897, 13(565):463)). Indeed, whilst both *The Feathered World* and *The Fanciers' Gazette and Homing World* published a balance of letters for and against Lumley's expulsion, the latter was seemingly more sympathetic, publishing Lumley's letters, interviewing him, and describing his opposition as "assailants" (*FGHW*, 1897 (13(565):490)). The *Fanciers' Gazette and Homing World* suggested that it was mainly the "London section of the committee" who disliked Lumley, stating that their opinions would not be "upheld by the general body of members scattered throughout the country" (*FGHW*, 1897 (13(567):523)). The paper also supported a defence fund for him, Mrs Comyns-Lewer having "commenced an action for libel" against the Reverend (*FGHW*, 1897 (13(571):590)).

Upon his expulsion, Lumley formed a break-away club entitled the United Kingdom Pigeon Club (UKPC) (est.1897), although, perhaps not surprisingly, it received almost no coverage in *The Feathered World*. Ten years after the split, in 1907, Lumley and Pigeon Club Secretary Mr Harrower agreed to amalgamate the two clubs in an attempt to foster unity and strength amongst the Fancy. The new club was called 'The Pigeon Club (*wherein are amalgamated the Pigeon Club and the United Kingdom Pigeon Club*)', shortened to 'The Pigeon Club'. The original Pigeon Club's rules were kept, Mr Cresswell (President) and Mr Harrower (Secretary) retaining their offices. Influenced by the UKPC, the new Club had nine regional branch committees – Scotch, Irish, Welsh, Northern, North-Eastern, North-Western, Midland, South-Eastern, and South-Western – each making local decisions and having equal bargaining power at central meetings. Two years on

from the amalgamation, however, “owing to the most unsatisfactory state” of the new Club’s management, more resignations from the Club were reported in *The Feathered World*, including the paper’s Mr Lewer and Mrs Comyns-Lewer, who called the 1907 merger “unfortunate” (*FW*, 1909 (41(1054):321)). Mrs Comyns-Lewer stated: “it will be unnecessary for the club, *as at present conducted*, to forward me further news of its proceedings. The space of *The Feathered World* can be better utilised” (*FW*, 1909 (41(1054):321)). Thus, from 1909 Mrs Comyns-Lewer exercised a severe form of censorship – explaining the scarcity of Pigeon Club reports in the paper – further illustrating the ways in which newspapers become complexly entangled in political battles. She believed that the Club was “not a body that it is desirable in the interests of the Fancy to be associated with” (*FW*, 1909 (41(1054):321)).

4.3.2 The Marking Conference (est. 1885)

Whilst the Pigeon Club was undergoing these alterations and challenges during the first twenty-five years of its existence, the Marking Conference, its counterpart formed at the same meeting in 1885, was itself experiencing reorganisation and criticism. The Marking Conference was established exclusively to deal with ‘marking’ or the identification of birds, a task for which the Pigeon Club had no responsibility. Mr Allsop of Birmingham Columbarian Society served as Honorary Secretary of the Conference for thirty-two years, from its inception until his death.

Marking was a means of ascertaining a bird’s age – confirming their eligibility to compete in ‘young bird’ (<1 year old) or ‘old bird’ (>1 year old) classes – and also linked birds in the show pen to their owners, thus helping distribute prizes. It was, therefore, a practical way of identifying and defining birds as belonging to, or being owned by, fanciers. The Conference initially adopted a stamp system for marking birds, Fulton (1895:521) explained, whereby an “authorised dye” was used by Conference representatives at designated centres, to make an impression on the ‘flight’ (wing) feathers. After a 12-month trial, this system was deemed inefficient; markings were lost when birds moulted, and stamps could be replicated or faked. As a result, the Conference banned stamping and advocated metal rings instead, which established “the identity of the individual pigeon without doubt”, whilst preventing “the possibility...or suspicion of injustice” (*FW*,

1927 (76(1980):837)). The Marking Conference issued its own (optional) rings, although alternative independent rings were also used at some shows. Marking Conference rings were numbered and included the pigeon's year of birth. "A pigeon thus rung", one fancier wrote, "carried its identity mark from squab to grave" (*FW*, 1927 (77(2005):814)). The rings were made from aluminium, "non-corrosive...[and] very light", and were enamelled to stop fraudulent fanciers from cutting them off (*FW*, 1909 (40(1026):388)). Each year, the Marking Conference authorised the sizes, colours, and distinguishing marks of rings, different rings being made for different breeds to accommodate variations in leg sizes, shape, and feathering. A pigeon's ring, then, in its shape, colour, markings, and numbering, coded three identifying features – breed, age, and owner – and helped monitor, control, and order fancy pigeon populations.

The cost of Marking Conference rings was, one fancier suggested, "the working men fanciers' grievance", the price increasing from 1 ½d. per ring in 1891 to just over 2d. in 1907 (*FW*, 1907 (36(925):497)). These rings, then, were not universally used, one fancier explaining that they had "a perfect right to put any ring or any number of rings upon their birds", although admitting that this "virtually nullified" the Marking Conference's objectives, risking a "relapse once more into a sort of mark-as-you-please system, with all its opportunities for fraud" (*FW*, 1893 (9(233):592)). In 1893, for instance, the United Show Homer Club (USHC) threatened to adopt its own ring, objecting to the inconvenience caused by non-consecutive numbering used by the Marking Conference. In response to this, in 1896, Mr Allsop announced that each year the rings would be numbered consecutively (1-144), enabling fanciers to control and monitor breeding. Initially, however, each purchaser was sent rings for each breed beginning at 1, which meant that a bird's ring number was only unique to its loft, and not when placed in a showroom full of birds of the same breed. Most exhibitors, it seems, thought this was an "absurd system" that made verifying show results and pedigrees difficult (*FW*, 1905 (33(863):622)). Thus, whilst an attempt at identifying individual birds, this numbering system could, in fact, obscure individual pigeons. From 1907, breeders could request Marking Conference rings to start at any number and, in 1909, the upper ring number limit of 144 was removed, reducing the risk of duplicating numbers. By 1910, however, it seems that clubs were starting to boycott the Marking Conference ring, the UShC leading the way.

One year after Mr Allsop's death, in 1917, the Marking Conference ceased to manufacture rings "owing to difficulties as to labour and materials" (*FW*, 1918 (58(1490):33)). President Mr Palgrave Page organised for a temporary ring to be supplied to fanciers in 1918, but it was poor quality – made of copper and not enamelled – and expensive (3d. each). Fanciers believed that the controversy over rings was the catalyst for further reform in the organisation of fancy pigeon exhibitions, arguing that it "brought home to several members of the Marking Conference the absolute necessity of a properly constituted society to deal with both the issue of rings and the suppression of fraud" (*FW*, 1927 (76(1980):837)). As a result, in 1918, the Marking Conference – recently renamed the Pigeon Marking Conference – entered talks with The Pigeon Club about amalgamation.

4.3.3 The National Pigeon Association (est. 1918)

On June 21st, 1918, the Pigeon Marking Conference and The Pigeon Club amalgamated, vowing to lay "the foundations...of a truly representative controlling body" (*FW*, 1918 (58(1501):311)). The new body was called 'The National Pigeon Association and Pigeon Marking Conference', shortened to 'The National Pigeon Association' (NPA). Mr Palgrave Page – former Pigeon Marking Conference President – was elected the first NPA President, remaining so until the 1930s, and Dr Tattersall was elected Secretary until his retirement in 1931. Subscription was fixed at 21s. per annum, and a new aluminium ring was produced, costing 1s. 6d. for ten rings (2d. each). Despite fanciers' appeals in the pigeon press, the Association did not form regional committees, explaining that "any particular variety of fancy pigeons has only a small number of breeders in any one part of the country", calling "such decentralisation...impracticable and unworkable" (*FW*, 1927 (76(1980):837)).

The popularity of the NPA can, to some extent, be gaged from the ring sales published in *The Feathered World*, although, with no membership data published, interpretation is limited. The number of rings sold indicates the number of *pigeons* rather than members. Pigeon exhibitors owned varying numbers of birds – from only a couple of pairs to over 50 birds – but only rung those intended for show or sale. The ring sales published indicate a steady annual increase in the NPA's early years, from 20,000 in 1918 to almost 74,000 in 1925 (fig. 4.10).

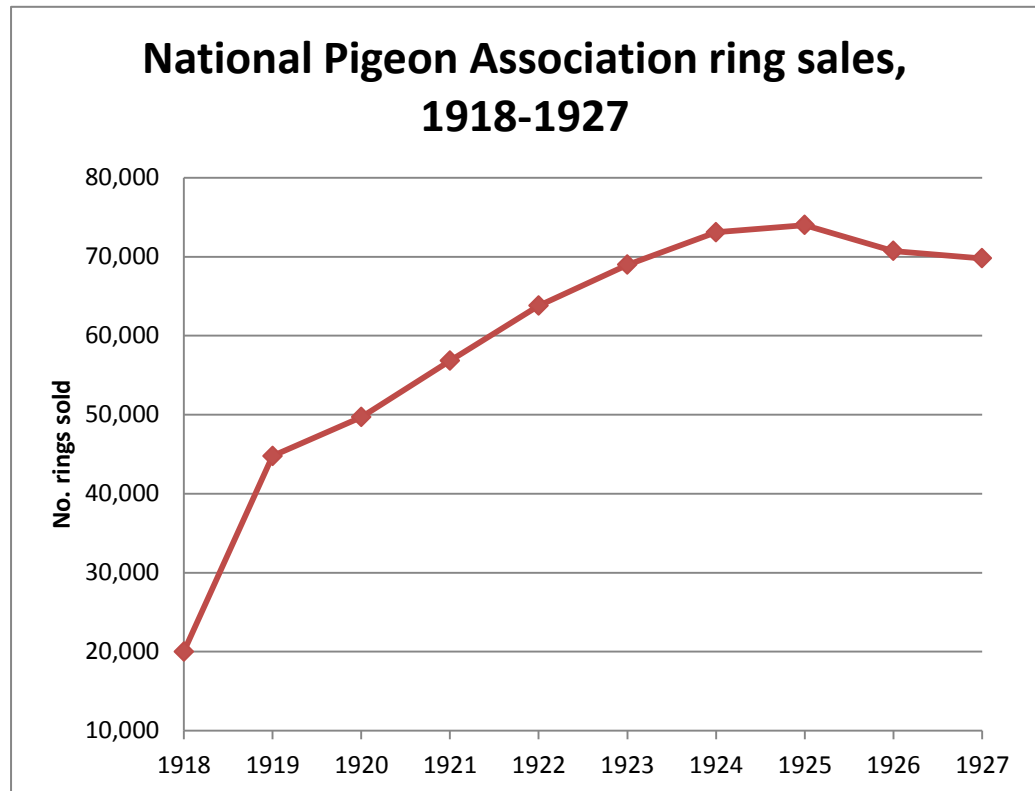


Figure 4.10: NPA ring sales, 1918-1927

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1918-1927

“In years to come”, one fancier suggested, “fanciers will look back to Jan. 1. 1926 as the beginning of a new era in the history of Pigeon Fancying”, since, on this date, the NPA implemented new rules (*FW*, 1925 (73(1904):937)). These rules, however, seemed unpopular amongst a lot of *The Feathered World*’s readers, and there was, correspondingly, a decrease (19%) in NPA ring sales at this time. Under the new rules, all pigeons at NPA-affiliated shows had to wear the official NPA ring *only*, meaning that exhibitors could no longer compete at shows using independent rings. Also amongst the new rules was the similarly unpopular ‘ring transfer’ rule, introduced to prevent the exhibition of borrowed or stolen birds, which meant fanciers had to pay 3d. to transfer their name to purchased birds. Exhibitors argued that the price of NPA rings was prohibitively high, the 1929 *Feathered World Year Book* advertising them at 4d. each. The Fancy was reportedly “a seething mass of discontent” (*FW*, 1927 (76(1978):771)), some fanciers accusing the NPA of ‘stealing’ the income from rings, instead of allowing individual clubs to make profits by re-selling rings to members, as was the case with the original Marking Conference rings. In this respect, fanciers felt like they were “slaves to the N.P.A.”, forced into buying over-priced rings with no

perceived benefit for their clubs (*FW*, 1931 (84(2172):238)). The Association, nonetheless, maintained that it made no profit and that any money raised contributed to prize money and covering fanciers' legal expenses. Thus, despite an apparent increase in support for the NPA compared to its predecessor, it was still not a truly representative national governing body.

In 1931, a series of letters to *The Feathered World* under the heading 'What's wrong with the pigeon fancy?' further expressed opposition to the NPA. Whilst some letters in defence of the NPA saw it as "a properly constituted body", which, one fancier claimed, enjoyed "the confidence of all self-respecting fanciers" (*FW*, 1931 (84(2175):374)), the Association was frequently criticised for poor show management and unfair division of prize money (*FW*, 1931 (84(2181):639)). One fancier appealed "let the whole of the Pigeon Fancy be free from the tentacles of that giant octopus, the N.P.A." (*FW*, 1931 (84(2175):374)), whilst another called the Association "irksome", "another impossible barrier" akin to the tax collector (*FW*, 1931 (84(2162):191)). Others felt that "when a body such as the N.P.A. starts to impose laws and regulation...then it is...not a hobby" (*FW*, 1931 (84(2174):333)). Fanciers, therefore, questioned how far the exhibition of fancy pigeons should be organised and standardised – and commercialised – before it destroyed the pleasure of their pastime.

4.4 The Shows

The growth of clubs and societies – labelled "the germ of the present Show system" by one NPS President (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):491)) – facilitated the growth of pigeon shows. The modern show system, Lyell (1887) explained, was initiated in the second half of the nineteenth century, superseding informal gatherings in public houses. The show season ran during Autumn and Winter, usually late-August to late-January. In Spring and Summer, agricultural shows and poultry shows also held classes for pigeons, although they were not very popular due to the time of year – birds were breeding, moulting, and generally not in 'show condition' – and, one pigeon exhibitor explained, they were seen as "Secondary Shows" (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):492)).

Early societies, as has been revealed, held private members-only shows during club meetings (fig. 4.11). The next step was taken by the Philoperisteron Society in 1848, accredited with holding the first *public* pigeon show in Britain, at the British Hotel, Cockspur Street. The show was held to settle disagreement amongst members about the 'correct' colour of the Almond Tumbler variety (see Chapter 5), and became an annual event, moving to The Freemason's Tavern, Great Queen Street. The Society's shows were non-competitive and only members could enter. Whilst the number of public visitors and the entry fees are unknown, the admittance of the paying public transformed the pigeon show from a gathering of fanciers to a public spectacle (fig. 4.12). Thus, like museums, zoos, and circuses, pigeon shows became animal attractions, a form of entertainment, and a feature of public leisure.

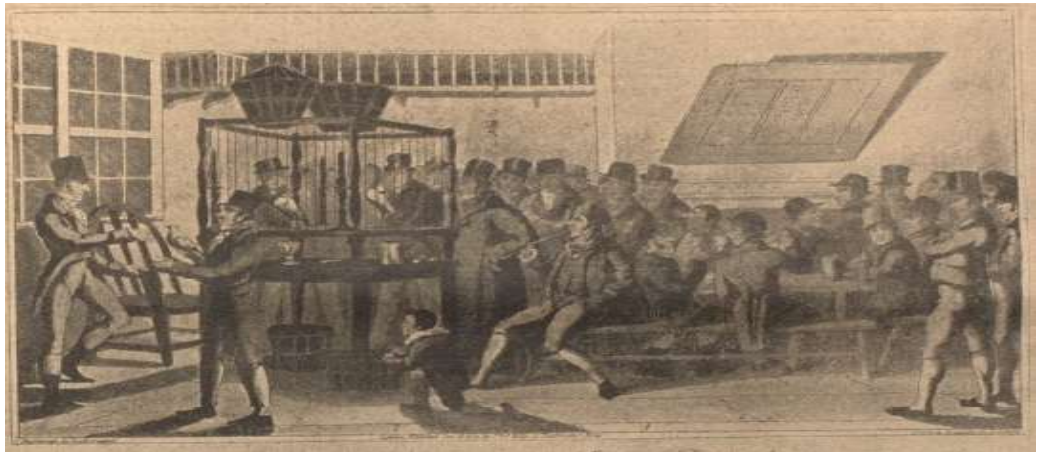


Figure 4.11: "A few knowing fanciers at an evening pigeon show": reproduced from an old print of 1823 given to Mr. Wm. C. Lamb by Mr. W.R. McCreath. An interesting record of old time fanciers"
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1911 (45(1172):1043)

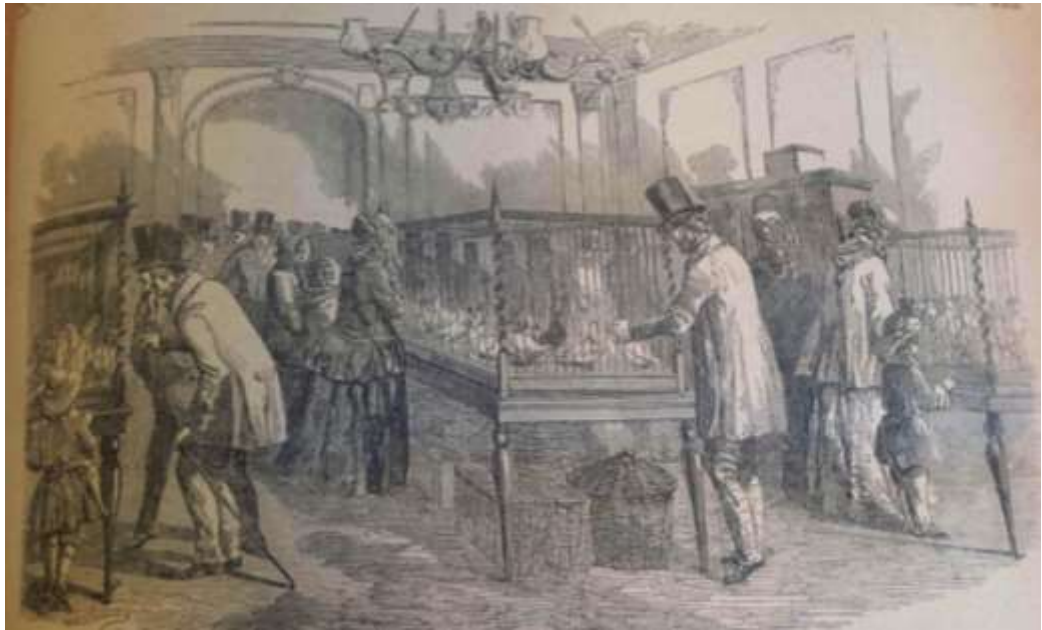


Figure 4.12: "The Philoperisteron Society's Show, 1853" by Harrison Weir, originally appearing in *'The Illustrated London News'*, January 15th 1853

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1897 (16(404):517)

Figure 4.12 depicts the Philoperisteron Society's 1853 show, drawn by future Pigeon Club President Mr Harrison Weir. The Society's "handsome mahogany pens" in the picture were renowned amongst the Fancy as elaborate display cases proudly framing 'beautiful' pigeons as products of their fanciers' skill (*FW*, 1910 (43(1099):68)). The drawing shows fanciers and members of the public – men, women, and children – inspecting the birds, with Harrison Weir himself in the centre. Reminiscing, he recounted the "brilliant hues" of the Almond Tumblers, the "finest ever" Jacobins, and the "never-to-be-forgotten sight" of the Nuns, thus accentuating the visual spectacle of the event (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):516-7)). The Philoperisteron Society's shows became "old traditions" and led the way for the development of further public shows (*FW*, 1897 (16(407):624)).

The truly 'open' show – for members and non-members – shortly followed the establishment of public shows. According to *The Feathered World*, the first open show for pigeons on record was held in connection with the Birmingham Agricultural Exhibition Society at Bingley Hall in 1850, thirty-five years before the formation of the Pigeon Club. The paper argued that "no show in the country has done more for the [pigeon] Fancy" (*FW*, 1930 (83(2155):509)). In its first year the show had only one class for pigeons, 5s. awarded to the best pair of any breed, and local man Mr Allsop (later of the Marking Committee) was amongst

the judges. The Show incorporated pigeons, poultry, cattle, and agricultural machinery, later expanding to provide more than 100 classes for fancy pigeons over two or three days every December or January. However, in 1889 Mr Comyns suggested that the show had “lost a good deal of its interest”, pigeon fanciers reluctant “to pay ten shillings for the privilege of loitering about amongst the cattle most of the day awaiting for the awards” (*FW*, 1889 (1(23):369)). Indeed, the Birmingham Show’s entry figures published in the sampled years of *The Feathered World* reveal a decline in pigeon entries between 1889 and 1913 of nearly 25%, from 1,223 to 920 (fig. 4.13). At such agricultural shows, one pigeon exhibitor wrote, “all is a rush and bustle” (*FW*, 1896 (14(341):41), another adding that there was “an obnoxious dust to both man and beast” (*FW*, 1918 (59(1520):107)). Thus, the presence of cattle at the Birmingham Show deterred pigeon fanciers, who were aware that their birds were “very sensitive to noise”, their comportment and general appearances ruined by the stress (*FW*, 1895 (13(338):654)).

From the mid-1920s, Birmingham’s pigeon and poultry sections were reportedly “held apart from the Cattle Show”, the result being fewer public visitors to the pigeon show, but an increase in entries (*FW*, 1925 (73(1898):633)). *The Feathered World* reported improved conditions for fanciers and their birds, accounting for an increase in entries of 73% between 1920 and 1926, from 1,256 to 2,177 (fig. 4.13). Similar conditions were described at the Dairy Show (est. 1876) – held in connection with the British Dairy Farmers’ Association at the Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington – the relocation of the cattle section due to foot-and-mouth scares in the 1920s improving the atmosphere for pigeon fanciers and their birds. There could, therefore, be tension between the sometimes incompatible needs of different animal species at combined shows, creating fascinating more-than-human affective spaces, fanciers calling for better design and spatial segregation of exhibition spaces.

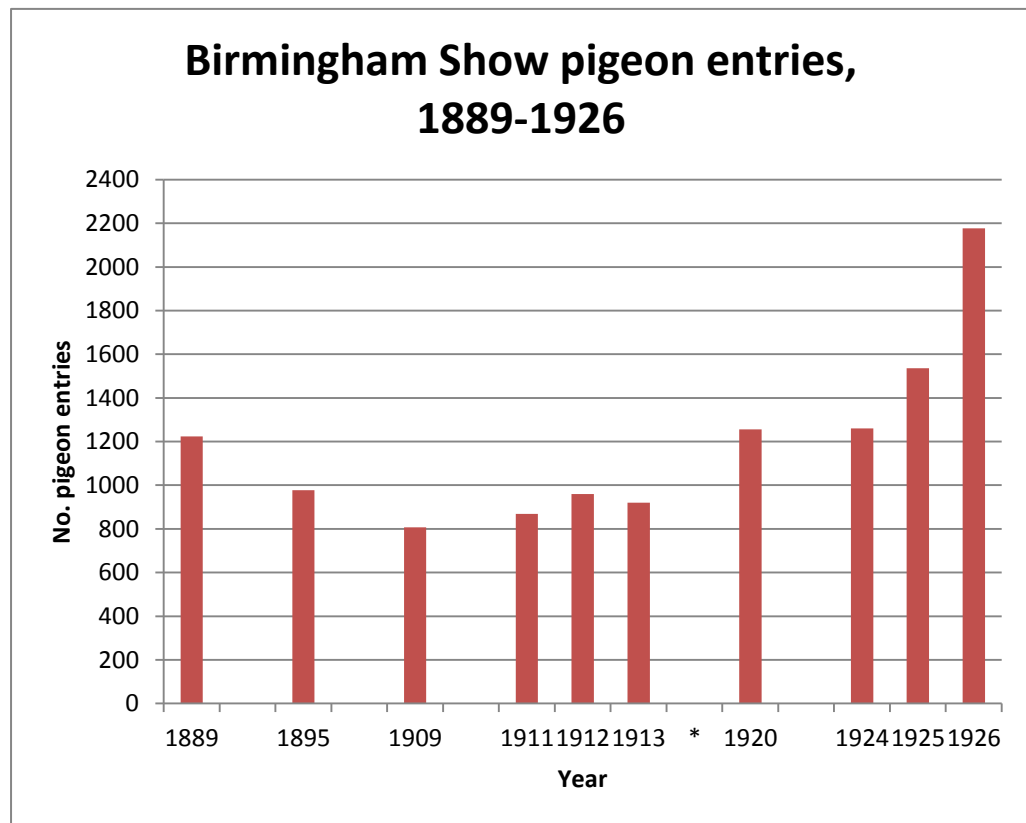


Figure 4.13: Birmingham Show pigeon entries, 1889-1926

*the Show stopped during World War One

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1889-1926

After the establishment of the first open show, “periodical displays became very popular...and pigeon fever soon became apparent and contagious” (*FW*, 1908 (39(1000):250)). Termed “the first of the classics”, the Birmingham Show became one of the ‘major’ annual shows in fanciers’ calendars, along with the Crystal Palace Show (est. 1869), the Dairy Show (est. 1876), and the Manchester Show (est. 1899) (*FW*, 1930 (83(2155):509)). These shows attracted competitors nationwide and occasionally internationally, and lasted at least two days. Many of the organising committee members and judges at these large shows were also involved in the Pigeon Club and Marking Conference (and later NPA), the most well-known men amongst pigeon exhibitors. Attracting the largest concentrations of fanciers in one place, a lot of clubs held their annual shows and meetings in conjunction with larger shows, these events determining “the owners or breeders of the best specimens of each variety” (Lyell, 1887:51). These shows were, therefore, important to both the value of pigeons and to fanciers’ reputations. They also included trade stands, “imposing displays” of appliances and products used to ‘create’ show birds, such as baskets, training pens, nest

boxes, baths, lofts, food, medicines, cleaning products, food hoppers, water fountains, heaters, and lights (*FW*, 1893 (9(230):508)). Thus, like Anderson's (2003) Latourian interpretation of agricultural shows, the fancy pigeon show illustrated how humans, pigeons, and technologies became complexly interconnected.

After 1850, then, open shows became the norm, ranging from large national and international shows – providing more than 200 classes over several days – to smaller one-day shows held by local societies providing around 30 classes. From those entry fees advertised in *The Feathered World*, there appears to have been a relatively large range, smaller shows charging between 6d. and 3s. per bird – about 1s. 6d. on average – and larger shows charging as much as 5s. per entry. Some shows were affiliated with – and, thus, run according to the rules of – the Pigeon Club (and later NPA), particularly the larger national shows. Whilst there appears to have been more prestige to be won at these 'major' shows, there was nothing to suggest that smaller shows were looked down upon, one exhibitor calling them valuable "dress rehearsals" for the larger shows (*FW*, 1898 (19(485):1009)). At local shows, House (1920:125) stated, local pride was at stake: "a desire...to win local approbation, to stand well in the eyes of your every-day friends". Thus, shows were a performance of – and attempt to improve – fanciers' reputations, which were embodied by their birds. Most shows were open to the whole country – and sometimes internationally – although some imposed geographical limits on entries, "thereby giving Amateurs a chance" (*FW*, 1895 (13(323):216)). "The greatest drawback to many shows", Reverend Lumley explained, was the "pot hunter", who travelled across the country winning all the prizes and discouraging entries at small shows (*FW*, 1890 (2(43):277)). Other clubs addressed this by arranging their shows to clash with 'major' shows, the advert for the 1909 Nottingham Goose Fayre, for instance, stating: "for the sake of the novice and the 'little man' we have been bold enough to *clash with the Dairy Show*, where the 'deck-sweepers' will be safely penned" (*FW*, 1909 (41(1058)490)). This advert parodied the show pen, simultaneously a display space for pigeon aesthetics and, in another context, a space of regulation, restriction, and control.

By the late-nineteenth century, a network of "well organised, systematic competitive exhibitions open to all" had reportedly been established in Britain

(*FW*, 1908 (39(1000):250)). *The Feathered World* regularly contained adverts and reports of shows, although the scale of the show system is difficult to ascertain from these records alone, adverts and reports varying in detail, format, and length. Show adverts were usually brief, details such as entry fees and prizes inconsistently incorporated, and show reports varied from detailed aesthetic descriptions to simple lists of winning fanciers, with or without total entry numbers.

Pigeon shows of all sizes became arenas for the production and diffusion of knowledge about fancy pigeons, ‘social locations of knowledge’ (Secord, 1981). As one fancier remarked, each visit to shows “brought its own reward in the form of a fresh stock of knowledge...[from] some of the leading fanciers in the land” (*FW*, 1890 (2):47:34)). These events were also social, the larger shows incorporating grand celebratory dinners combining instructional speeches and entertainment, becoming “more and more...social events, where the breeders of all varieties compete and meet in friendly rivalry” (*FW*, 1913 (49(1276):931)). As celebrations of pigeon aesthetics and fanciers’ skills, then, shows infused a collective identity around a shared appreciation of pigeons.

The report of the 1913 Dragoon Club Show held in connection with the Manchester Show, for instance, described the event as a ‘carnival’, a celebration of pigeons and fanciers, and included a cartoon depicting fanciers joyfully dancing (fig. 4.14). There was “good fellowship”, the report wrote, amongst all Dragoon fanciers, who were sometimes referred to as the ‘Dragoonites’ (*FW*, 1913 (49(1278:1082))). This example, then, shows that pigeon exhibitions could be performative encounters, the act of exhibiting pigeons closely linked to collective identity. Furthermore, these events enabled performances of fanciers’ individual identities or reputations within the Fancy through the display of their birds. The Dragoon Club report, for instance, stated that “the breeders of repute were represented by the cream of their respective lofts” (*FW*, 1913 (49(1278:1082))). Hence, the birds’ bodies also became performances, feathered embodiments of their fanciers’ reputations, their identities co-produced. This was illustrated by a cartoon accompanying the Club’s report (fig. 4.15). Echoing Darwinian evolution and adaptation, it showed ‘the evolution of the Dragoon’ from a pigeon into a fancier, demonstrating the co-constitution of fanciers and their birds.

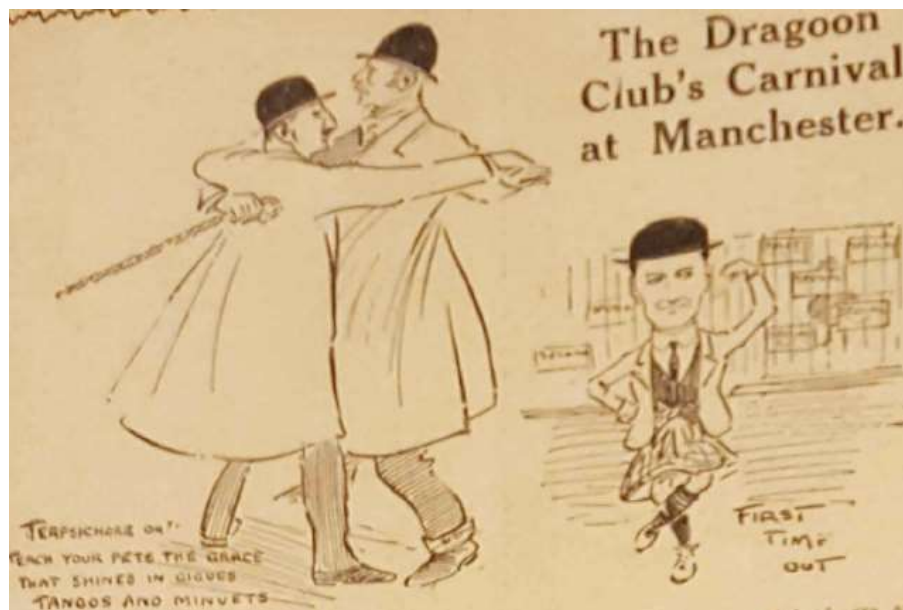


Figure 4.14: "The Dragoon Club's Carnival at Manchester", 1913

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (49(1278):1082)

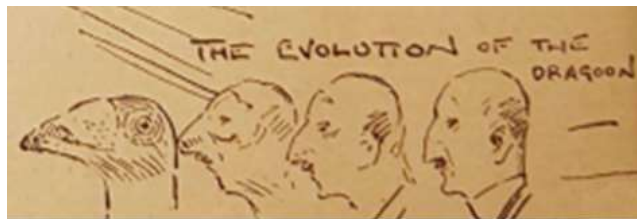


Figure 4.15: "The Evolution of the Dragoon", 1913

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (49(1278):1082)

4.4.1 The Crystal Palace Show

The Crystal Palace Show – established in 1869, sixteen years before the Pigeon Club – was termed “the great event of the year in fancy circles”, the largest and arguably most prestigious annual event on the pigeon exhibitor’s calendar (*FW*, 1889 (1(20):309)). It took place over two days in November or December, incorporating pigeons, poultry, and rabbits, nationally and internationally. The venue, built to house the 1851 Great Exhibition – an international celebration of Britain’s industrial achievements – was referred to as the ‘Glasshouse’ (fig. 4.16), a supplement to *The Feathered World* proudly describing it as “a genuine and unquestionable asset in the education and improvement of national taste...a great national institution...at the gateway of London, the heart of the British Empire” (*FW*, 1929 (80(2084):supplement pp23)). The prestige of the Crystal Palace –

which, following the Great Exhibition, had been used for education, sport, music, festivals, and other entertainment and leisure – therefore, gave the show impetus and reputation, the space of the venue moulding these feathered exhibits into features of national interest.



Figure 4.16: “The Crystal Palace, main entrance from the parade”, 1913

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (49(1276):931)

The Crystal Palace was reportedly one of the few places where “this gigantic show [could] be accommodated” (fig. 4.17), the venue simultaneously facilitating and attracting public visitors (*FW*, 1889 (1(20):309)). Whilst visitor numbers and admission costs were, unfortunately, never published in *The Feathered World*, exhibitors remarked on “the keen interest taken” by the public, “especially by the ladies”, claiming that such publicity was “the backbone of the growth of the Fancy” (*FW*, 1913 (49(1276):931)). A 1921 railway poster (fig. 4.18) further suggests that there was public interest in the Show, the poster advertising admission costs of 2s. 6d. on the first day, or 1s. on the following two days.



Figure 4.17: The Crystal Palace Show through time: "The International Show, Crystal Palace", 1907; "Some of the pigeon pens at the Palace from the Gallery", 1913; "The judges at work, looking down the centre of the Crystal Palace", 1925

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1907 (37(960):731); 1913 (49(1276):931); 1925 (73(1900):737)



Figure 4.18: A South Eastern and Chatham Railway poster for the Crystal Palace Show, 1921

Source: Object No.1979-7797, National Railway Museum, York

The public were originally not allowed to be present during the judging at the Crystal Palace Show, but, from 1900, visitors paid 5s. to watch as judges selected 'perfect' pigeons. Exhibitors, however, bemoaned that the public hindered judges, asking what they deemed to be 'ridiculous' questions. Writing in 1911, for instance, one regular columnist recalled overhearing a woman at the Show observing the Pouters, a breed that inflated its breast ('crop') significantly (see figures 4.19 and 5.13) to show affection, contentedness, "when called upon to do so or when showing off" (F & J Smith, 1908, No.12). Upon seeing these birds with their inflated crops, the woman exclaimed to her friend: "Quick, Maud, lend me your hatpin, this poor bird has wind on the chest and cannot get rid of it!" (FW, 1911 (45(1171):915)). A similar instance at the 1933 Dairy Show was reported in *The Feathered World* (fig. 4.19), spectators overheard supposing that the Pouters and Fantails – the latter supposedly "the best known pigeon" to the

general public (F & J Smith, 1908, No.8) – appeared ‘overfed’ (FW, 1933 (73(1896):576)).



Figure 4.19: Cartoon accompanying the 1933 Dairy Show report

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1933 (73(1896):576)

Nonetheless, the 1925 Palace Show report regretted that “a show of this kind *does not attract the general public* as it ought to do” (FW, 1925 (73(1900):737)). It claimed that more visitors attended the pigeon sections at shows that included cattle, such as the Birmingham and Dairy Shows, than at shows specifically for fur and feather: “to stimulate interest...some other attraction must be provided as well” (FW, 1925 (73(1900):737)). The report, framing animal shows as ‘attractions’, emphasised the spectacle and objectification of pigeons as ‘exhibits’, similar to those on display at zoos, circuses, or museums. Interestingly the Manchester Show – referred to as ‘the Palace Show of the North’ – was itself held at Belle Vue Zoological Gardens, thus locating its pigeon show within the wider context of public animal spectacle. To increase visitor numbers to the Crystal Palace, organisers recommended the integration of a cattle show – like at the Birmingham and Dairy Shows – although there was no evidence of this being implemented.

The Palace Show’s claim as the largest pigeon show was based on its superior entry numbers. Using those figures reported in the sampled years of *The Feathered World*, figure 4.20 shows fluctuations in entries between 1889 and 1931 and a general increase of nearly 54% over the forty-two years. From 1906, the Show expanded in size and entries, subsuming another show – the ‘International Show’ – which had previously clashed with the event. From then, one “large cosmopolitan and international event” was held each year at the

Crystal Palace, described as a “‘landmark’ to every fancier”, and was variously termed the ‘(Crystal) Palace Show’, the ‘International Show’, and the ‘Grand International Show’ (*FW*, 1905 (33 (857):822)). A decline in entries at the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, fanciers suggested, was due to travel costs, unemployment, and industrial depression, one fancier writing:

“so many of the Crystal Palace’s warmest supporters in Wales and Durham and Yorkshire have all they can do at the moment to keep their pens of birds together, much less afford the money for a joy-ride” (*FW*, 1931 (85(2213):721)).

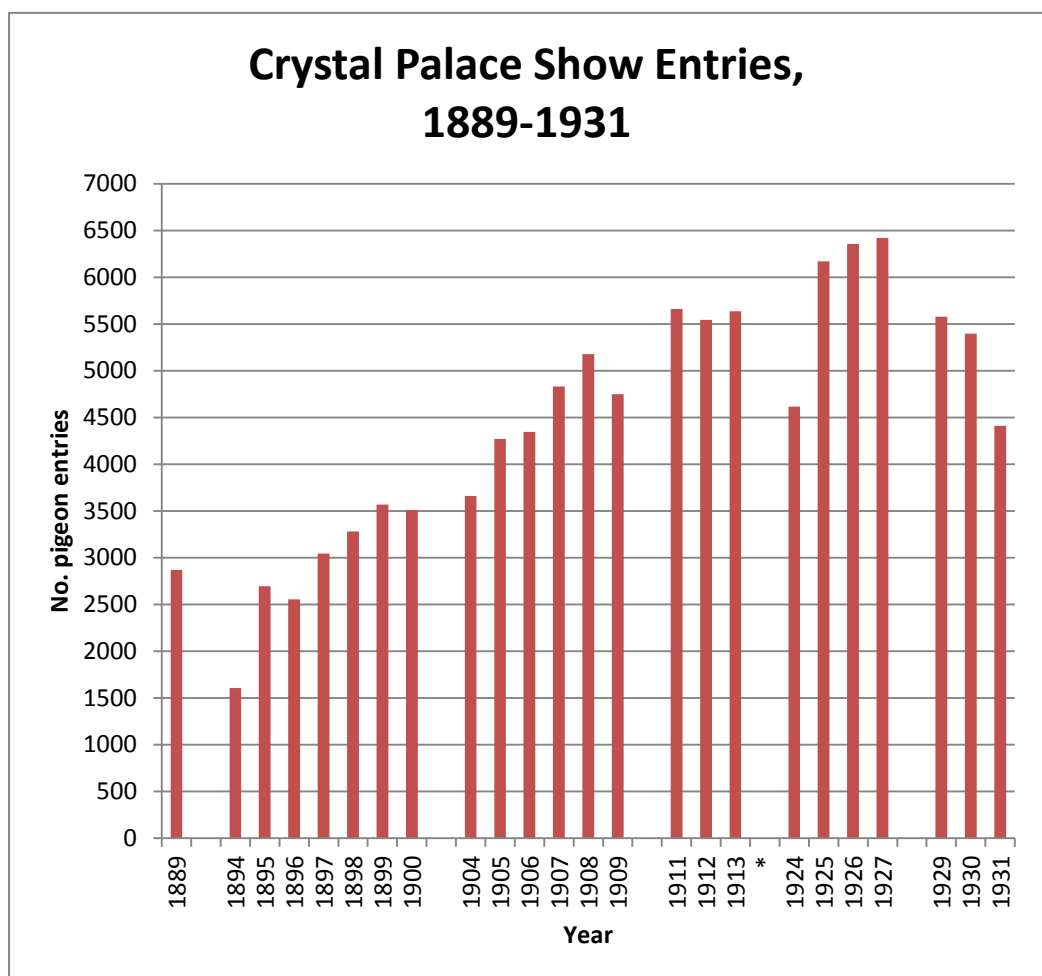


Figure 4.20: Crystal Palace Show pigeon entries, 1889-1931

*the Show stopped during World War One, restarting in 1923

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1889-1931

These entries can be compared to the Dairy Show (est. 1876), reportedly the second largest pigeon show at the time (fig. 4.21). In the late-nineteenth century, entries at the Dairy Show were similar, but slightly lower than those at the

Crystal Palace, but they increasingly diverged until, in 1931, Dairy Show entries numbered less than two-thirds (58.8%) of the Palace entries. This was, perhaps, as already discussed, due to the Dairy Show's agricultural focus, fanciers worrying that the atmosphere of such a combined show would affect their birds. Furthermore, in the 1930s, unlike the Palace Show, the Dairy Show focused increasingly on appliances and profit-breeding. The two other 'major' shows – Birmingham (est. 1850) and Manchester (est. 1899) – had even fewer entries, about a quarter of the size of the Crystal Palace Show, and about half that of the Dairy.

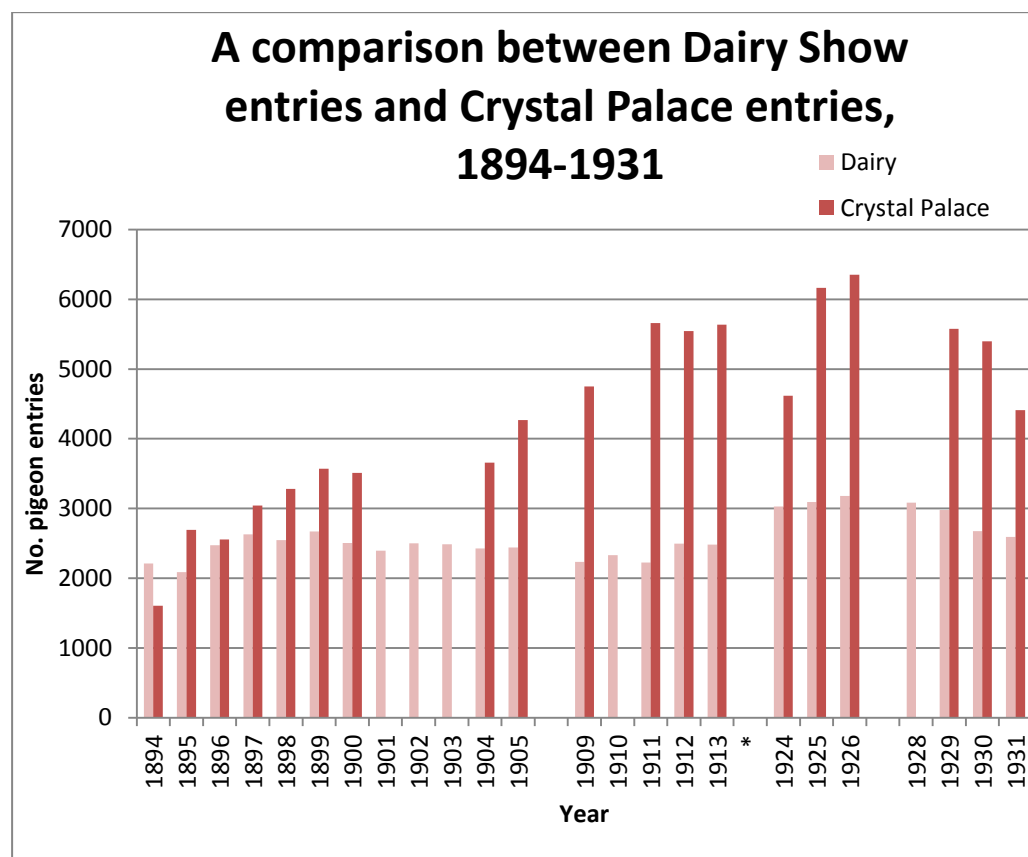


Figure 4.21: Dairy Show and Crystal Palace Show pigeon entries, 1894-1931

*the Dairy Show stopped World War One, restarting in 1920

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1890-1935

However, unlike the Palace and the Dairy, the Birmingham and Manchester Shows managed to run during World War One, the latter being the only 'major' show to continue every year throughout the War. Fanciers who were not enlisted as soldiers continued to keep fancy pigeons during the War, although some reportedly reduced the number of birds they kept due to the cost of feeding them. Shows continued but decreased significantly in number and were mostly local

rather than national. Fancy pigeon exhibitors were affected by the wartime introduction of Police permits for keeping and transporting pigeons, initially enforced to restrict pigeon *racing* (see Chapter 6). At the outbreak of War, due to confusion between some fancy breeds – mainly Carriers, Show Homers, and Exhibition Flying Homers (see Chapter 5) – and racing pigeons, fancy pigeons were treated with suspicion, lofts subjected to “visits of detectives” (*FW*, 1914 (51(1315):287)). However, revised restrictions for transporting fancy pigeons to shows were published in September 1914, *The Feathered World* reporting:

“pigeons (other than homing and racing pigeons) for shows, and pigeons which may be tendered for conveyance O.H.M.S. (On His Majesty’s Service) may be accepted” (*FW*, 1914 (51(1315):287)).

4.4.2 Profitable Pigeons

Whilst fanciers fully supported and promoted exhibitions, some argued that their increasingly competitive and commercial nature was detrimental to the pastime. Indeed, Ure (1886:70) stated that, by the late-nineteenth century, shows had “become by far too numerous to be successful or beneficial to the fancy”. In his 1907 NPS presidential speech, Mr Daniels claimed: “a very potent factor in the moulding of many present-day ideals is simply the monetary value to be gained...in keeping with the spirit of the age” (*FW*, 1907 (36(925):491)). This, fanciers worried, could result in ‘over-showing’ of birds, “the wear and tear of constant journeyings from one show to another”, cruelly damaging their health and sometimes killing them (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):491)). For most fanciers, over-showing was an ‘evil’, driven by monetary greed, Lucas (1886:11) criticising those who kept “birds not for pleasure but for the profit”. Ure (1886:72) believed that “a real fancier does not first consider if it will pay”, a letter to *The Feathered World* echoing that there was no “better return...than the pleasure” (*FW*, 1891 (4(89):173)).

Exhibitors were divided as to whether pigeon showing was truly profitable, most agreeing that it could be a struggle to break even due to the money spent caring for their birds. The chances of winning prizes, however, appear to have been quite high due to the division of entries and prizes into small classes. Classes divided birds by breed, sub-breed (e.g. short-faced, long-faced, etc.), gender, age,

and colour. Whilst entry numbers were not always reported in *The Feathered World*, in general, total entries at local shows ranged from fewer than 50 to over 400 entries, each class rarely having more than 20 entries. From those reported in the paper, most shows gave three prizes per class, most commonly 10s. for first, 5s. for second, and 2s. 6d. for third. Prize money was, nonetheless, proportional to the number of entries, the bigger shows able to offer bigger prizes. The 1923 Crystal Palace Show, for instance, offered four prizes – 20s., 10s., 6s., and 4s. – in each class. As well as the top prizes, other birds were awarded ‘highly commended’ or ‘very highly commended’ prize cards, and some shows also presented ‘Specials’, sponsored trophies, and a ‘Best in Show’.

The increasingly competitive atmosphere at shows redefined birds as social capital or commodities with price tags. One fancier argued that shows were “instrumental in causing an increase in the demand for and an advance in the prices...of birds...thus facilitating the disposal of stock” (*FW*, 1897 (16(407):624)). At some of the larger shows, auctions were held, fanciers bidding on pigeons, fighting to claim ownership. These competitive judgements about the ‘value’ of birds seem somewhat troubling, although fanciers did not criticise this method of buying birds. What did trouble fanciers, however, were pigeon ‘dealers’, who demonstrated neither love for pigeons nor comradeship with fellow fanciers. Ure (1886:89) called them “the pests of the fancy” responsible for increasing the prices of birds, whilst Lucas (1886:12) explained that dealers kept birds “not to breed, but to barter”, buying birds “as a speculator buys shares”.

The majority of fancy pigeons were, however, sold via adverts in the pigeon press for more modest sums. Adverts in *The Feathered World* were very brief, fanciers paying 2d. per word. As such, few adverts described the visible features of the birds, those that did keeping it short, such as: “Silver Owl Cock, splendid round skull, thick beak” (*FW*, 1896 (14(340):25)). Furthermore, and possibly due to cost, adverts in the paper did not contain photographs. Given the pastime’s emphasis on appearances and the primacy of the visual in judging pigeon aesthetics (see Chapter 5), the format of these adverts, then, seems somewhat incongruous.

According to Lyell (1887:51), some “really first-rate birds” in the late-nineteenth century had been bought for “sums varying from £25 to £50”, whilst others cost

as much as £100. Mr Daniels, in his 1907 NPS presidential address, added that some birds had been sold for “£50 or even £500” (*FW*, 1907 (36(925):491)). These were, nonetheless, extremes, the majority of birds in *The Feathered World* priced at considerably less than £5. Prices varied but changed little with time, plenty of fancy pigeons available for less than £1, whilst the cheapest birds cost as little as 1s. each. To put these prices into context, economic historian John Burnett (1969) estimates that, in the 1890s, around 59% of the working classes earnt less than 25s. (£1 5s.) a week, a further 30% earning between 25s. and 35s. a week. The average weekly rent at this time, he adds, cost about 5s., over a fifth of the lowest wages. Whilst these are only general estimates that mask diverse incomes – real wages constantly fluctuated along with the cost of living and varying geographically and between occupations – the price of fancy pigeons suggests that for some these birds were investments or treats, whilst for others they were routine purchases.

An interesting moral geography is created by putting a price on animals, making subjective judgements about their ‘value’ or ‘worth’. The ‘value’ of fancy pigeons was culturally constructed, Eaton (1851:iv) explaining:

“the value of the birds, as usual with matters of taste, will depend much on the estimated qualities of the birds; and if they should be of extraordinary beauty and excellence...the price will be proportionably high”.

Some of the more expensive prices were paid for the most popular breeds, such as Show Homers, Pouters, and Long-faced Tumblers, whereas ‘flying breeds’ such as Flying Tipplers and Rollers fetched some of the lowest prices. Birds were also regularly sold in pairs, a complex cumulative ‘value’ of birds estimated.

Nonetheless, prices were ultimately subjective and, as some adverts show, dependent upon the reputation of both the fancier and his loft. Full-page adverts in *The Feathered World* and those in *The Feathered World Yearbooks* usually advertised a loft rather than individual birds. They emphasised the cumulative successes of the *fancier*, or the pedigree and achievements of a whole ‘stud’ of birds, promoting fanciers as much as their birds, and concealing individual pigeons (fig. 4.22). The identities of fanciers and their birds were, then, co-produced and co-dependent. As one fancier suggested, adverts could be used to

“dress your windows as attractively as you can”, thus constructing an imaginative ‘value’ for pigeons (FW, 1930 (83(2166):1015)). Thus, fancy pigeons were, to borrow from Harvey (1998), accumulations of social capital, their bodies defining the status of their fanciers. Pigeons were examples of what Haraway (2008) would call ‘lively capital’, comprising an economic (monetary) value, a ‘social value’ affecting the status of their owners, and, as this thesis explores, an ‘encounter value’ performed through transformative human-pigeon relationships.

FRANK ROBINSON
(President of the British Holle Cropper Club)
BREEDER AND EXHIBITOR OF HIGH-CLASS
HOLLE CROPPERS
(MAINLY SELF-COLOURS)
Birds bred from this Stud have won at all the principal Shows (see Reports),
including:—Dairy, Crystal Palace, Birmingham, Barnstaple, York, etc.
Stock Birds and Show Specimens usually for Sale.
“HILL CROFT,” Lowther Street, PENRITH, England.

SEARS' SATINETTES STILL WINNING

Twenty-seven years breeder of Satinettes.
Only Birds bred and sold to Novices in the
last three years; have bred for them
1st Dairy, 1st Palace, 1st Club Show.
I have won every honour it is possible to
win with this Stud
33 Challenge Cups and Trophies Outright.
A FEW BIRDS FOR DISPOSAL.

A. SEARS,
684 HIGH ROAD, LEYTONSTONE, Essex
and 13 Huddleston Road, Forest Gate.

GEMS OF THE ORIENT.
JAMES F. KING, Egrove, Nr. Oxford, England.
ORIENTAL EXPERT, BREEDER, EXHIBITOR and JUDGE.
THE WORLD-FAMED STUD OF
ORIENTAL FRILLS
SPECIALITIES: Blondinettes and Satinettes in all Colours and Markings.
This Stud has produced during the last 30 years, winners of The Fulton Trophy, The
Ramsley Trophy, The International Trophy, The Heroes' Trophy, many of the Oriental Frill
Club Trophies (outright), and a host of other Trophies and specials.
PRICES AND FULL PARTICULARS ON APPLICATION

Figure 4.22: Adverts for birds emphasising the fancier's successes and pedigree of their 'stud', 1929

Source: *The Feathered World Year Book* (1929:576)

The birds that fanciers purchased were used in breeding, fanciers rarely exhibiting 'ready-made' birds that they had not bred themselves. Fanciers also used *The Feathered World* to request particular breeds or birds with particular features, framing them as useful commodities or collectibles. This is also evident in a collection of letters to Wigan fancier Mr Gregory (*Mr Gregory's letters*, 6th January, 1898; 1st January 1901). One letter, for instance, wrote: "you might let me know if you have any Short face Agate Hens. If so send on particulars of what you have" (*Mr Gregory's letters*, 20th February 1901a). Some adverts in *The Feathered World* interestingly offered to exchange birds, almost like the exchange of trading cards, assumptions being made about a subjective scale of worth between different breeds, sub-breeds, or even aesthetic qualities. Further evidence of this was found in Mr Gregory's letters, fanciers writing to him and proposing trades (*Mr Gregory's letters*, 1st January 1901). Fanciers also offered exchanges for goods, one letter suggesting that "a nice pearl locket penknife and case of razors" was a suitable swap for a pair of short-faced Almond Tumblers (*Mr Gregory's letters*, 20th February 1901b). Thus, echoing Marxist interpretations of commodity values, fancy pigeons became possessions, their exchange value determined by their potential 'uses' as show or breeding stock. Indeed, one letter to Mr Gregory offered him the parents of a bird that had already been sold, both "good breeders" due to their "good colour", but neither suitable for showing due to age and injury (*Mr Gregory's letters*, 27th February 1901). The 'value' of pigeons, then, was complex and mutable, combining economic, social, and imaginary values.

4.4.3 Travelling to Shows

When travelling to a show, House (1920) argued, the health and condition of fancy pigeons were at risk. Some exhibitors used "makeshifts", improvised baskets that could cause "a great amount of suffering upon their inmates" (*FW*, 1893 (9(219):211)). Fulton (1895), instead, recommended baskets with individual compartments for birds (fig. 4.23), which were clean, lined, well-ventilated, and the correct size so that birds were neither cramped nor thrown about. Pigeons had to be accustomed to baskets, one fancier recalling:

"most birds when put into a basket struggle to get out...there is always the chance of one bird (perhaps more) poking its head between the

opening of these inner lids just as you are closing down the outer lid...killing the unfortunate bird” (fig. 4.24) (*FW*, 1910 (43(1112):584)).

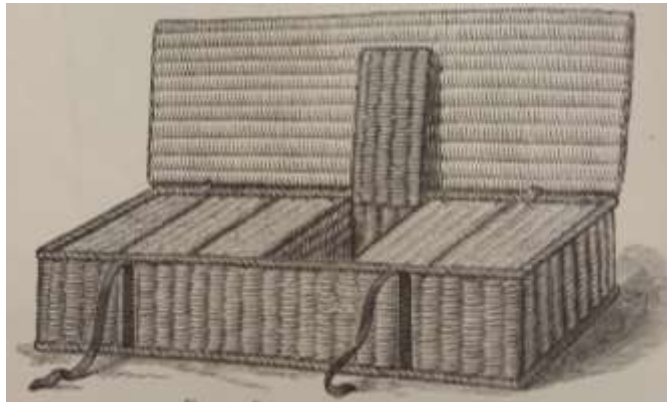


Figure 4.23: “Basket for pigeons generally”, 1895

Source: Fulton (1895:54)



Figure 4.24: “An object-lesson against wide-barred baskets”, 1913

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (48(1253):1161)

Before the use of trains, baskets of fancy pigeons travelled to shows by foot, bicycle, or packhorse. Articles and letters in *The Feathered World* emphasised that the growth of railways in the nineteenth century had facilitated the expansion of pigeon exhibitions, fanciers and birds able to attend shows nationwide. The relationship was, however, two-way, one fancier writing: “the poultry and pigeon Fancy feed the railway companies each year with an enormous revenue” (*FW*, 1895 (13(3298):326)). Birds usually travelled unaccompanied to the railway station closest to the show, and were picked up by the show’s organising committee the day before it began. This meant that pigeons were, as one fancier put it, at the “tender mercies of railway officials” (*FW*, 1895

(13(338):654). Fanciers complained that birds were sometimes damaged or injured in transit, left in draughts or damp, deprived of food and water, stored with heavy luggage or other animals, lost in transit, sent to the wrong station, delayed, or even mistaken for racing birds and released. One fancier wrote: “the way many baskets are handled by railway porters and officials is extremely disgraceful” (*FW*, 1897 (17(424):144)). As a result, railway companies were liable for damages to fancy pigeons in transit. The Midland Railway Company’s timetables, for instance, stated that the Company would only transport pigeons

“on the terms that they shall not be responsible for any greater amount for damages for the loss thereof, or injury thereto, beyond the sum of 5s.” (*Midland Railway Timetables*, May 1st to June 30th 1878, pp101; October 1911, pp166).

The Pigeon Club (and later NPA) petitioned railway companies throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries for better terms and facilities. In 1890, for instance, the Club addressed the Railway Rates Commission and the Board of Trade over “exorbitant insurance rates” for travelling birds (*FW*, 1890 (2(49):376)). The railway companies charged 3s. 4d. to insure a fancier’s birds against “all risks whilst in transit and care of the railway company”, for travel to and from just one show, 30s. for ten shows, 35s. for twenty shows, and 80s. for a whole year (*FW*, 1890 (3(74):364)). Other fanciers complained about transport costs. Pigeon baskets – containing fancy or racing pigeons – were charged by weight and distance at ordinary parcel rates (fig. 4.25), with no concession on their return, unlike other animals. Most fancy pigeons only weighed about 1lb, but fanciers frequently sent multiple baskets to shows containing at least half a dozen birds each. Examples of conveyance costs can be ascertained from railway ‘Way Bills’ – tickets filled in stating the weight and price of convoys. Figure 4.26, for instance, shows pigeons weighing 8lbs and costing 1s., travelling from Mansfield to Keighley (about 70 miles) during October 1893. Fanciers also objected that men were allowed to accompany livestock such as horses for free, whereas pigeon exhibitors were charged full fare to travel to shows. The railway companies and fancy pigeon exhibitors were, then, in constant dialogue. These debates were also significant to pigeon *racers*, and will resurface in Chapter 6.

SCALE OF RATES FOR THE CONVEYANCE OF PARCELS BY PASSENGER TRAIN

Between LONDON and stations enumerated in following pages.

TO AND FROM STATIONS MARKED:—

For parcels weigh- ing lbs.	A		B		C		D		E		X		Z		S		For parcels weigh- ing lbs.
	1 to 30 Miles.		31 to 50 Miles.		51 to 100 Miles.		101 to 200 Miles.		Above 200 Miles.								
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	
1	0	4	0	4	0	5	0	6	0	6	0	4	0	4	0	4	1
2	0	5	0	5	0	6	0	6	0	6	0	4	0	4	0	4	2
3	0	6	0	6	0	7	0	7	0	7	0	4	0	4	0	4	3
4	0	6	0	6	0	8	0	9	0	9	0	4	0	4	0	6	4
5	0	6	0	6	0	9	0	10	0	10	0	4	0	4	0	6	5
6	0	6	0	6	0	10	1	0	1	0	0	4	0	4	0	6	6
7	0	6	0	8	0	10	1	0	1	0	0	4	0	4	0	6	7
8	0	6	0	8	1	0	1	2	1	3	0	4	0	4	0	8	8
9	0	6	0	8	1	0	1	2	1	4	0	5	0	5	0	8	9
10	0	6	0	8	1	0	1	4	1	6	0	5	0	5	0	8	10
11	0	6	0	8	1	0	1	6	1	8	0	5	0	5	0	8	11
12	0	6	0	8	1	0	1	6	1	8	0	5	0	5	0	8	12
13	0	6	0	9	1	1	1	7	1	9	0	5	0	5	0	8	13
14	0	6	0	9	1	1	1	7	1	10	0	5	0	5	0	8	14
15	0	6	0	9	1	2	1	8	1	11	0	5	0	5	0	8	15
16	0	6	0	10	1	2	1	8	1	11	0	5	0	5	0	8	16
17	0	6	0	10	1	3	1	9	2	0	0	6	0	6	0	9	17
18	0	6	0	10	1	3	1	9	2	1	0	6	0	6	0	9	18
19	0	6	0	11	1	4	1	10	2	2	0	6	0	6	0	10	19
20	0	6	0	11	1	4	1	10	2	3	0	6	0	6	0	10	20
21	0	6	0	11	1	5	1	11	2	4	0	6	0	6	0	11	21
22	0	6	1	0	1	5	1	11	2	5	0	6	0	6	0	11	22
23	0	6	1	0	1	6	2	0	2	5	0	6	0	6	1	0	23
24	0	6	1	0	1	6	2	0	2	6	0	6	0	6	1	0	24
Above 20 lbs. per lb.	0	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	0	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	0 $\frac{3}{4}$	0	1	0	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	0	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	0	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	

Fractions of a penny are charged as a penny.

Figure 4.25: The Midland Railway's Scale of Rates, 1918, pp1

Source: RFB27267, Midland Railway Study Centre, Derby

(A.)

A. B. R.

MIDLAND RAILWAY.

COUNTERFOIL OF WAY BILL for Carriages, Luggage, &c., Horses, Cattle, Asses, Mules, Dogs, and other Quadrupeds, and for Poultry and other Live Birds by Passenger Train.

115 in. Train No. 16 Date 18-10-93

From Worcester to Leighley

Via _____

No. of Horse Box _____ No. of Carriage Track _____

QUANTITY.	DESCRIPTION.	Date. s. d.	Paid in. s. d.	To Pay. £ s. d.	Paid. £ s. d.	Paid Horses Luggage. £ s. d.
	Carriage Wheels					
	Carriage Trucks					
	Cov. Trucks (Extra)					
	Truck of Luggage					
	Invalid Road Carriage					
	Horses					
	Bulls					
	Neat Cattle					
	Stags					
	Sheep					
	Pigs					
	Asses or Mules					
	Dogs					
	Other Quadrupeds					
	Poultry or other Birds					
	Declared Value £					
	Percentage on £					
	Total Weight lbs					
	Allowed					
	Excess					
	EXCESS					
	LUGGAGE					
	Excess					

Percentage on £ at 1½ per cent.

Enter Amount in column marked +

Consignor's Name _____ Consignee's Name _____

Address _____ Address _____

NOTICE.—The Midland Railway Company are not, and will not be Common Carriers of Horses, Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Asses, Mules, Dogs or other Quadrupeds, or of Poultry, or other Live Birds, and receive, forward, and deliver the same solely on and subject to the conditions on the other side.

I agree to the above notice, and to the Conditions printed on the other side.

W. Chamberlain
Owner or on Owner's behalf.

NOTE.—When the value of any animal is declared at the time of booking to be higher than the amount specified in the conditions on the other side, a declaration as to value must be signed by the sender, and a percentage at the rate of 1½ per cent. charged on the excess of the value declared.

(SEE BACK.)

Figure 4.26: Example of a Midland Railway Company Way Bill, 'Midland Railway book of 100 counterfoils of Way Bills for Horses, Carriages, Luggage etc. by Passenger Train', 10th October, 1893
Source: RFB26237, Midland Railway Study Centre, Derby

4.5 In the Showroom

The venues of shows varied from a marquee – in spaces such as fields, parks, cricket grounds, or skating rinks – to a public house, local hall, or school, to large halls or warehouses (fig. 4.27). The showroom itself was a space of encounter between fellow fanciers and between fanciers and pigeons, an arena for

interaction and performance. Fanciers proudly exhibited carefully-prepared 'beautiful' birds as extensions of themselves and products of their skill, ingenuity, and hard work.



Figure 4.27: "The Scottish Metropolitan Show", 1907 (top); "Watching the [prize] lists at Otley. Mr. Tom Firth finds a hamper useful", 1925 (bottom)

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1907 (37(965):1041); 1925 (72(1874):780)

In the showroom, rows of pens were arranged with "broad alleys between...allowing plenty of room to the throngs of people which visited" (*FW*, 1913 (49(1276):931)). These spaces were kept clean and tidy by companies employed to maintain a hygienic environment for both fanciers and pigeons, retaining a sense of orderliness and control. Where space was limited in showrooms, pens of pigeons were stacked upon each other (fig. 4.28), a method which exhibitors deplored. "With double-tier penning", one fancier wrote, "a bird on the top may look tall, whereas another in the same class on the lower pen appears just right" (*FW*, 1931 (85(2215):818)). Furthermore, birds on lower tiers, some stated, could be hidden by the shadows of the pens above, and were

almost 'out of sight' of judges. The positioning of pens, then, like the staging at a theatre, affected the interpretation and appreciation of pigeon's visual aesthetics.



Figure 4.28: "Which shall it be? Mr C.A. House judging the Carriers" at the Dairy Show, 1927

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1927 (77(2000):574)

The temperature of the showroom was a further consideration at shows, upon which fanciers and show reports often commented. Marquees could let in wet, windy, and cold weather, although buildings were also not immune from the elements. The 1903 Crystal Palace Show, for instance, was reportedly "both cold and draughty" (*FW*, 1903 (29(751):889) and, at the 1910 National Peristeronic Society Show, the report wrote, there was "little difference between that inside...and the wintry day without" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1172):1043)). Fancy pigeons could be susceptible to such conditions since, as one fancier put it, they were used to being "pampered and kept unduly warm" in their lofts (*FW*, 1895 (13(338):654)). At the other extreme, however, exhibitors at the 1908 Dairy Show complained that pigeons had begun to shed their feathers due to the "almost unbearable" heat (*FW*, 1908 (39)1007):541)).

A final aspect of the showroom regularly mentioned in *The Feathered World* was lighting. It was, in fact, a question of lighting that had led to the abovementioned first ever public show held by the Philoperisteron Society in 1848. Members of the Society could not determine the colour of the Almond Tumbler under artificial lighting at their evening meetings, whereas "in daylight...birds could be better examined than was possible by artificial light" (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):491)). Another fancier added that "yellow-topped birds may look white" under artificial

lights (*FW*, 1931 (85(2215):818)). Lighting, therefore, affected judging, making “the good points of the bird...more easily distinguished” (*FW*, 1913 (49(1279):1129)). Venues with large windows or glass roofs, such as the Crystal Palace, were ideal, one fancier advocating “*a good top light* and...an end light to face the rows of show pens, the alleys between the rows...nicely lighted” to avoid shadows (fig. 4.29) (*FW*, 1931 (85(2215):818)). In a similar way to stage lighting, then, the exhibits had to be lit up to highlight their ‘beauty’ and facilitate their appreciation.



Figure 4.29: “A view of Tottenham Show”, 1931: photograph accompanied an article on the ideal showroom

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1931 (82(2215):818)

4.5.1 Encounters Through the Bars

In the showroom, pens acted as frames for pigeons and a space in which their aesthetics were both defined and performed. Some of the early elite societies owned pens described by fanciers as ‘iconic’: large, elaborately-decorated wooden pens, in which multiple birds could be placed, such as the Philoperisteron Society’s aforementioned mahogany pens (see fig. 4.12). Its predecessor, The Feather Club, reportedly also had “a special pen...set apart every meeting night for Almond Tumblers...made of solid brass...each column contained a candle holder, and the four candles were lighted at every meeting...It was a sight to behold” (*FW*, 1907 (36(926):549)). These candles served as spotlights to illuminate the feathered subjects, adding to the ritualistic and ceremonial nature of club meetings. Such grand pens often had green baize

covering the bottom, which reportedly “made the birds look very attractive”, acting as a backdrop against which pigeons were presented for aesthetic judgement (*FW*, 1895 (13(333):478)).

All open pigeon shows, however, used small wire pens for individual birds, provided by penning companies. The most commonly mentioned penning company in *The Feathered World* was ‘Spratts’, who were regularly in charge of penning at the Dairy, Crystal Palace, and Birmingham Shows, and also sold pigeon and poultry appliances and food. Pens were either square or, as Lyell (1887:54) preferred, a “beehive shape”. Figure 4.30 shows the two types of pens in use at Lambeth Baths in 1914. In the centre can be seen two rows of beehive pens containing Pouters, whilst either side of them are square cages containing Jacobins and Dragoons. Inside the pens, some breeds were given wooden blocks or stands, which served almost as a pedestal on which to display birds. These were particularly used for Pigmy Pouters, Pouters, and Norwich Croppers (fig. 4.31) – closely related ‘blowing’ varieties – which, Osman (1910:79) explained, helped “show their girth and thighs to advantage”, and prevented their tails from draping on the floor.



Figure 4.30: “The Pigmy Pouter and Jacobin Show at Lambeth”, 1914

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1914 (51(1331):874)



Figure 4.31: "A Palace Winner" (Norwich Cropper), 1923

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1923 (69(1795):775)

Some show reports told of birds being stolen during shows and, as a result, a variety of methods were used to secure pens, including stapling them down, tying them with wire, and using padlocks. The penning of birds was reportedly "done in such an orderly way", pens uniquely numbered in order to aid identification when distributing prizes (*FW*, 1913 (49(1276):931)). Each bird was given its own numbered space in which to display its aesthetics. Pen numbers, however, whilst used as identification, also helped to separate the birds from their fanciers, since judging was undertaken without knowledge of who had bred them. Indeed, exhibitors were not allowed to be present for the judging. Thus, for a rare – and at arguably the most pivotal – moment, the birds were disconnected from the fanciers with whom they were so closely linked. Fanciers, therefore, prepared their birds in advance.

The preparation of fancy pigeons was the 'backstage' – practices unseen and, perhaps, out of character – to these performances, the solitary 'perfect' pigeon in the show pen simultaneously displaying and concealing their fancier's work. There were two types of preparation that went on 'backstage: the sometimes controversial aesthetic 'finishing touches' to a bird's appearance, referred to as 'faking' (see Chapter 5); and the much less contentious behavioural conditioning. For the latter, Osman (1910:70) explained, pigeons needed to be accustomed to the pen, advising that "birds must have some education at home...they must be

trained to the show pen". This was referred to as 'pen training', its importance regularly emphasised by exhibitors. "Want of training", one fancier wrote, was the cause of "so many birds crouching in so ungainly a fashion" or darting around the pen (*FW*, 1889 (1(1):4)). Thus, the behaviour of pigeons affected the ways in which judges perceived them; part of their aesthetic was behavioural, a performance that had to be rehearsed. In order to "add style in carriage" to birds and improve their "comportment" (*FW*, 1889 (1(1):4)), fanciers took their birds into a separate room – or even into their house – and placed them in training pens, wicker baskets, or boxes for "an occasional hour or two" to acquaint them with these enclosed spaces, reportedly making "a world of difference in their deportment" (*FW*, 1914 (51(1306):9)).

Some breeds had particular features which needed to be 'shown off' in the pen. The Pouter (see fig. 5.13), for instance, Osman (1910:80) explained, "should be taught to blow and distend its crop", adding that all breeds should be "taught to stand in the pen like models". Pouters, House (1920:179) wrote, were "very tame and tractable", explaining that "they must be talked to, stroked with the judging-stick, have the fingers snapped at them, and 'croowed and coowed' to...[to] make them strut and stalk about their cages in a dainty yet dignified style, the while blowing out their crops in the approved manner". This practice of encouraging pigeons to 'perform', then, involved fanciers mimicking the sounds that their birds made, acting like and almost 'becoming' a pigeon. It also, however, involved cooperation between fanciers and their birds, who, through these close encounters, formed a partnership. Whilst animals in pens may, to some, seem physically separated, the bars of the training pens enabled the performance and interaction between fanciers and pigeons, rather than acting as a barrier, containing the birds and yet allowing fanciers to engage with them. This practice assumed that fanciers had control over their birds' behaviours, portraying pigeons as malleable and docile, although, whilst no explicit references were made, it is likely that some birds resisted such training. Thus, pens acted as spaces of interaction through training, and stages on which pigeons could show off their aesthetic features.

4.5.2 Judging Pigeons

Judges were appointed – sometimes paid and sometimes voluntary – either to adjudicate a whole show or to oversee certain classes. They were authority figures, their decisions giving “the hall-mark of quality to exhibits” (*FW*, 1929 (81(2109):721)). A judge, therefore, had the power to redefine pigeons as ‘perfect’ or ‘faulty’, their awards making or breaking exhibitors’ reputations. Fanciers agreed that a judge had to be “selected from the ranks of breeders”, but also that they should never judge their own birds or birds that they had previously owned (*FW*, 1890 (2(37):183). In general, judges were either ‘specialists’ or ‘all-rounders’. Judges specialising in certain breeds were, in theory, the most reliable, “a man...able to judge that variety absolutely correctly” (*FW*, 1931 (84(2179):562)). In contrast, the all-rounder “should know something about all, or most, varieties”, something which, NPS President Mr Jupe explained, was very difficult (*FW*, 1931 (84(2179):562)).

National shows recruited some of the bigger names amongst the Fancy as judges, many of whom were associated with the Pigeon Club, Marking Conference, and National Pigeon Association, such as Mr Harrower, Mr Allsop, Mr Fulton, Reverend Lumley, and Dr Tattersall. These men, however, also judged at their local shows, raising the profile, prestige, and entries at these smaller events. A lot of judges wore long white coats, distinguishing themselves as authority figures, and were helped by a steward (fig. 4.32). It was the judges’ jobs to select the top three birds in each class, despite the efforts of some fanciers to influence or bribe them. They could also disqualify birds, banning their exhibitors from future shows (Fulton, 1895). The majority of disqualifications appear to have been for two main reasons: exhibiting birds in the wrong class – colour, age, sex, or sub-breed – or, as one fancier put it, exhibiting birds with “hidden blemishes, trimming, staining etc.” (*FW*, 1930 (82(2118):148)). The latter, referred to as ‘faking’, was one of the most controversial subjects in the Fancy and is explored in the next chapter.



Figure 4.32: "A 'Short-faced' Smile"; judge (left) and steward (right) at the Short-faced Tumbler Club Show in conjunction with the Crystal Palace Show, 1923

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1923 (69(1795):777)

Stewards aided judges with three main tasks. Firstly, they attended to “the comforts of the exhibits”, putting the pigeons in and out of pens, feeding them, and making sure they always had water (*FW*, 1889 (1(1):4)). This often involved attention to the specific needs of different breeds. Breeds with large beak wattles, for instance, could not reach through the bars of pens for food; breeds with large eye ceres could not see small grains of food; smaller varieties with shorter beaks needed smaller food; and breeds with large crops were not fed at all before judging. Whilst the work of stewards was generally appreciated, some fanciers complained that conditions at shows amounted to ‘cruelty’. Fulton (1895:56) wrote that sometimes stewards provided “neither proper food, proper food-vessels, nor proper attendance”. Secondly, stewards helped with administrative tasks, such as attaching prize cards to pens, putting up prize lists, and basketing birds after the show. However, one fancier complained, “so many pigeons are lost at the various shows” due to stewards putting birds in the wrong baskets (*FW*, 1898 (18(452):309)). Finally, stewards acted as mediators between the public and the Fancy, able to ‘translate’ the pastime to non-fanciers, some visitors

reportedly being “converted into members if helped and interested by the stewards” (*FW*, 1931 (85(2215):818)).

In judging fancy pigeons, three main methods of assessment were used: visual evaluation of conformation according to a standard (see Chapter 5); visual judgement of stimulated movement; and a more hands-on approach to gage the ‘feel’ of a bird. The judgement of the birds’ movement took place in specially-designed large pens called ‘walking pens’ (fig. 4.33), which acted as show rings or catwalks (fig. 4.34) in which their movement was monitored. The walking pen was considered “the supreme test of a pigeon”, one exhibitor wrote, allowing them to show off their bodily aesthetics and motion (*FW*, 1925 (72(1865):491)). At shows where these were provided, birds were removed from their own pen and placed into the walking pen, judging sticks used to nudge them through the bars of the pens and encourage movement (fig. 4.35). This enabled judges to see the birds’ mobility, turn them around, lift their tail, or make them stand upright. The behaviours rehearsed in the training pen were put into practice, pigeons reacting to the judge and moving accordingly. Thus, the judges’ encounters with these birds – and their aesthetic judgment of them – were mediated by the space of the cage and the use of the judging stick, and were manipulated by fanciers’ preparation.

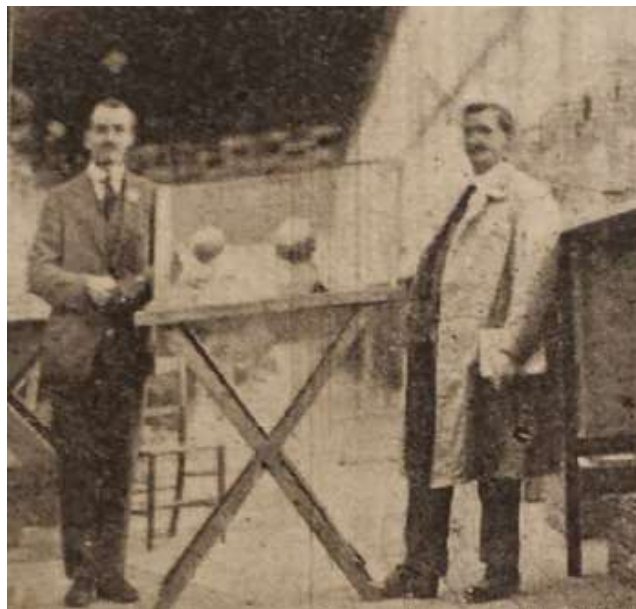


Figure 4.33: “In the Walking Pen”: Norwich Croppers at the Crystal Palace Show, 1923
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1923 (69(1795):774)

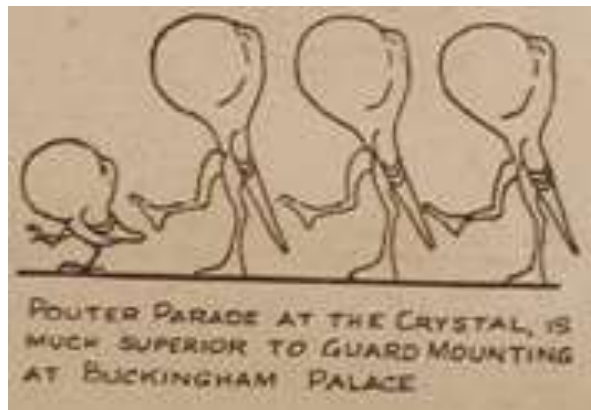


Figure 4.34: A 'parade' of Pouters: cartoon accompanying the 1929 Crystal Palace Show report
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1929 (81(2109):735)



Figure 4.35: "Walking out a Pigmy Pouter": judge using a judging stick at the 1927 Crystal Palace Show

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1927 (77(2002):769)

Walking pens were particularly useful, Lyell (1887) recommended, for breeds with unique bodily movements. The Fantail (fig. 4.36; also see Chapter 5), for instance, walked with a "characteristic jerky motion and proud strut" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1169):780)). The Fantail was originally called the 'Shaker' (Moore, 1735), its name, "describing its 'motion', or trembling, when showing off" (*Aids to Amateurs*, 1909, No.14). The Fantail Club's standard published by Fulton (1895:242) specified: "the bird should stand on tip-toes, and walk in a jaunty manner...head – thrown back in a graceful manner...conclusive jerking or twitching of the neck". Fanciers were anthropomorphic and yet passionate in their descriptions of

Fantails, one fancier remarking how they “pompously parade[ed] every possible beauty before the...judge” (*FW*, 1898 (19(497):1009)). Another wrote:

“the mincing gait gives the Fantail an air of refined pride. Pompously the pigeon struts on tiptoe, flaunting its matchless beauty with a saucy assurance that smacks of utter vanity. Its small head sways lightly on the flexile neck; a broad breast swells up...The preferable shaking action is a sort of strutting walk, the pigeon holding its head low upon the tail-base, and with easy rocking motion stepping slowly forward” (*FW*, 1898 (18(452):318)).

Thus, an important part of the Fantail’s aesthetic was in its ‘choreography’, the way that it moved, behaved, and stood, their manoeuvres mapped out and rehearsed through training.



Figure 4.36: “Hold Up, My Beauty!”: Fantail judging in the walking pen at the 1923 Palace Show
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1923 (69(1795):772)

The final method of assessment relied not on vision, but on touch – the way that birds felt ‘in the hand’ (fig. 4.37). Judges, then, not only encountered fancy pigeons through the bars of the pen, but also engaged with them more closely, illustrating a further dynamic to their definition of ‘aesthetics’. Fanciers agreed that “the majority of pigeons require[d] to be handled when judging”, that quality could be *felt* (*FW*, 1930 (82(2117):102)). For example, one fancier wrote: “to the touch...a good Homer should feel like a solid smooth lump, hard and slippery, and difficult to hold. The wing...highly springy” (*FW*, 1900 (22(555):267)). Handling a pigeon, however, was “unnatural from the pigeon’s point of view” (*FW*, 1930 (82(2117):102)), and it was, therefore, important to handle them “with the

utmost tenderness” (FW, 1897 (16(404):516)). Fanciers accustomed their birds to handling from an early age, developing a close and trusting relationship with them. One regular *Feathered World* correspondent recommended: “handle pigeons as you would that beautiful Sèvres vase which is competed for at the Palace” (FW, 1930 (82(2117):102)), always with clean hands, gloves, or a handkerchief. There was a “recognised method” of holding pigeons, with which the majority of fanciers were, it seems, familiar: the bird lay in the palm of the hand, whilst the thumb and fingers secured its tail and wings (FW, 1930 (82(2117):102)). Despite this, “so many fanciers hold a pigeon in an awkward, uneasy position”, one exhibitor complained (FW, 1907 (37(955):482)). After the judging, birds were also sometimes handled by other interested fanciers, under the supervision of their owner. Almost like toys between admiring and enthusiastic children, birds could be, one fancier wrote, “thrust into, or snatched out, of the hands of half a dozen bystanders...feather-ruffling...the poor thing...pushed into the pen dazed and half throttled” (FW, 1930 (82(2118):148)). This, therefore, was juxtaposed to the care and respect with which most fanciers professed to treat their show birds.



Figure 4.37: “A Winning Self”: judging Self Tumblers ‘in the hand’ at the 1927 Birmingham Show
Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1927 (77(2002):768)

Judges’ decisions were regularly discussed in *The Feathered World*, fanciers “grumbling at the judging” (FW, 1893 (9(229):474)). One letter in 1930 suggested the NPA introduce a rule that judges “should possess full qualifications for the job...by making every aspirant for such appointments pass a qualifying exam” (FW, 1930 (82(2162):833)). Licensing judges “would have its good and bad points”, Mr Jupe argued, for whilst it had the potential to improve the quality and consistency of judging, it could also discourage fanciers from becoming

judges, particularly unpaid judges at smaller shows (*FW*, 1931 (84(2179):562)). He claimed that judging was a “thankless task”, emphasising that “no one is infallible, and every judge, whether he be a specialist or an all-rounder is apt to make a mistake” (*FW*, 1931 (84(2179):562)). Inconsistencies in judging were also largely due to personal taste. Whilst judges had breed standards to judge to (see Chapter 5), they also had their own preferences – ‘types’ – when it came to colour, size, and features. One fancier protested: “at present it is necessary to keep two sets...[of Long-faced Tumblers], one large and one small, to suit the different judges”, calling judges’ tastes “detrimental to the Fancy” (*FW*, 1895 (12(292):118)). As a result, it was “not desirable to have the same judge at all leading shows” (*FW*, 1890 (2(37):183)), and fanciers studied their judges in advance to “try and give him the type he likes or the variety he goes for” (*FW*, 1933 (*FW*, 1933 (88(2289):755)). Tension arose due to this unavoidably subjective side to judging. Whilst fanciers exercised precision and control in breeding and preparing their birds, and clubs and organisations attempted to standardise and govern the pastime, ultimately, in deciding which birds were ‘perfect’ specimens, objectivity was, as the next chapter will explore, impossible.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter offers an insight into the social world of fancy pigeon exhibiting, exploring the ways in which it was structured. Through tracing the formal organisation of pigeon shows, tales of human identity-struggles map out the pastime’s history and provide a window into wider class and gender relations. Female pigeon exhibitors were, it seems, quite rare, or, at least, they were rarely acknowledged. Whilst most fanciers claimed that their pastime brought the lower and middle classes together in competition, there was, it seems, a distinct divide in the Fancy based on social class. This was demonstrated by the early socially-exclusive societies and, whilst the NPS appears to have been the last of these, the press continued to make distinctions between less fortunate working-class fanciers and privileged middle-class fanciers. Whilst the final performance was undertaken by the birds, it is likely that the money spent on them assisted their aesthetic displays.

It was through the practices regulated by clubs and the governing bodies that fanciers and pigeons were drawn together, encounters which shaped

relationships amongst the Fancy and between fanciers and their birds. The fancy pigeon show was a fascinating aesthetic encounter between pigeons and fanciers, a carefully crafted inter-species spectacle or performance, with the show pen as its stage. The subjects of the performance were pigeon aesthetics and human ingenuity, fanciers and their birds becoming inextricably linked. These were public spectacles of pigeon bodies, but also performances of human identity. Put 'on display', these feathered exhibits were subjected to a human gaze, objectified, criticised, and valued. These performances were, however, carefully mediated, 'rehearsed' by training and taming the birds, a collaboration and culmination of encounters between fanciers and fancy pigeons. Through their aesthetic performances, then, pigeons also helped to create knowledge about themselves. The formation of clubs and governing bodies, the logistical and organisational choices that they made, and the performance of pigeon aesthetics at shows, were devices for framing knowledge about fancy pigeons amongst the Fancy, redefining them in a very visual way. The next chapter discusses further attempts to understand and delineate fancy pigeons, examining fanciers' pursuit of the 'ideal' pigeon, their engagement with aesthetics, and the mutability of their tastes.

Chapter 5 Delineating ‘Beauty’: Imagining ‘Ideals’ and Presenting Pigeons

Fancy pigeon shows during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were public spectacles of animal bodies, of ‘beauty’ that was bred, ‘improved’, and objectified by humans. Discussions of ‘beauty’ and ‘aesthetics’ in pigeon showing, as this chapter reveals, reflected wider aesthetic debates, the late-nineteenth century aesthetic movement emphasising beauty and pleasure in ‘art for art’s sake’ (Spencer, 1972). Indeed, Reverend Lucas (1886) celebrated this in his book *The Pleasures of the Pigeon Fancier*, dedicating it to major Victorian cultural figure and art critic, John Ruskin (1819-1900). Lucas (1886) wrote that Ruskin – whose teaching and artworks drew on an affinity between ‘beauty’, ‘truth’, and ‘Nature’ (Cook, 1968; Cosgrove, 1979) – had taught him “to see beauty in earth and sea, mountains and clouds, in flowers and birds, and God in everything”. Fascinatingly, Ruskin accepted the dedication (fig. 5.1) and replied: “I wish I could have done those pigeons for you”. It is, however, unclear whether Lucas had asked him to supply the book’s illustrations – birds being some of his many subjects – or whether Ruskin was congratulating the artists, amongst whom was Mr Harrison Weir of the Pigeon Club. For society in general in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, ‘beauty’, ‘aesthetics’, ‘taste’, and ‘fashion’ were constantly being redefined, becoming heavily-contested, politically-charged, and morally-loaded. As this chapter will discuss, the same was also true of the breeding, preparation, and exhibition of fancy pigeons.

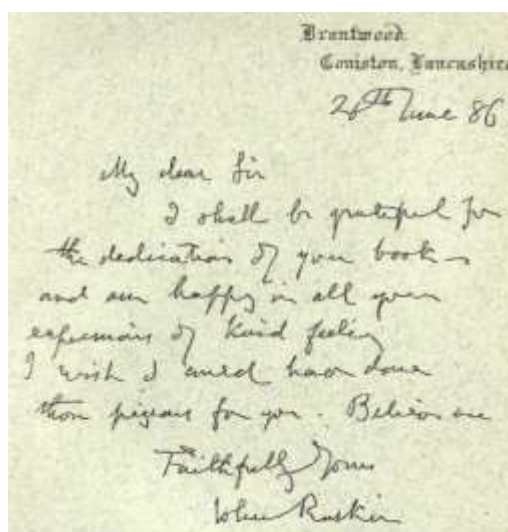


Figure 5.1: Ruskin's acceptance of Lucas' (1886) dedication

Source: Lucas (1886)

This was a period when the *human* body was being subjected to aesthetic scrutiny. As the Victoria and Albert Museum's collections reveal, Victorian fashion – particularly female fashion – was wide-ranging and fluid, from early-nineteenth-century crinoline cages to late-nineteenth century puff sleeves, hats, and corsets characteristic of 'power dressing'. There was a "moral meaning attached to various kinds of clothes" (Valverde, 1989:168), a form of visual coding which served to simultaneously regulate and express gender and class identities (Valverde, 1989; Breward, 2007). 'Taste' – interpreted by Bourdieu (1984) as aesthetic choices and consumption that become the basis for social judgement – was highly political in the nineteenth century, an expression – and defining aspect – of social status and identity.

Accordingly, adverts for human fashion and beauty products featured in *The Feathered World*, appearing to echo pigeon fanciers' preoccupations with *avian* aesthetics. Figure 5.2, for instance, shows an 1898 advert for John Noble's Victorian Costumes, boasting "excellence of material, make and finish", and illustrating the importance of quality, style, and appearances to Victorian society (*FW*, 1898 (16(413):813)). Despite the similarities, fanciers did not make any direct comparisons between human and avian fashion themselves. This is interesting, especially as one particular female fashion trend had been directly inspired by their feathered fancies: the 'pouter pigeon' style – originating in the 1780s and popular with Victorian and Edwardian women – was so-called because the gathered blouse gave the effect of a puffed breast similar to that of the fancy breed (Jenkins, 2003).

10/6 THE JOHN NOBLE VICTORIAN COSTUMES 12/9

THREE GOLD MEDALS AWARDED
for Excellence of Material,
Make, and Finish.

In honour of the Queen's
60 Years' Reign, **JOHN NOBLE & CO. LTD.**,
the largest firm of Costumiers
in the World, are producing
SIXTY new designs, all made
up in TWO excellent fabrics:
1.—**JOHN NOBLE SUMMER
COSTUME COATING.** A
smooth surfaced, fashionable
cloth; and in
2.—**JOHN NOBLE CHEVIOT
SERGE**, the world-renowned
durable and weighty fabric.

PATTERNS of both cloths,
together with latest BOOK
OF COSTUMES, SENT POST
FREE, and need not be
returned.

No Half-Guinea Costume
in the market is worthy
to compare with
JOHN NOBLE'S.

Model 712.—Smart Men
Costume, well cut square
Coat, fashionable sleeves,
well cut **10/6** Price 10/6
complete, navy jacket
and carriage paid, 6d. ex-
tra. Skirt only 2/6, car-
riage 6d.

Model 658.—
A Young Lady's Costume,
bodice made with prettily
gathered front and shaped
belt. Well-cut skirt.

LENGTHS AND PRICES.
35in. 38in. 42in. 46in.
6/11 7/11 8/11 9/11 each
Carriage paid 6d. extra.

Model 650.—A becom-
ing Costume, made with
p-letted Zouave fronts,
edged good **12/9** Price 12/9
complete, navy jacket
cut skirt in a recent tailor
design. Price only 12/9.
Packed in leather-board
box, and carriage paid, for
1/- extra.

Model 645.—A girl's
popular and serviceable
Costume with saddle top,
loose hanging skirt, full
sleeves, and deep cuffs,
prettily trimmed gold silk
braids.

Size... 21 24 27 30 33 36 in.
Price 2/9 3/4 4/- 4/6 5/6 6/3 ea.
Carriage paid, 6d. extra.

Please mention "The Feathered World" when ordering.
BANKERS: LONDON AND MIDLAND BANK.

JOHN NOBLE LTD., (Dept. No. 87,
Brook St.
Mills, **MANCHESTER.**

Figure 5.2: Advert for Victorian clothing in 'The Feathered World', 1898

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1898 (16(413):813)

How to Obtain A Better Looking Nose!

Improve your
personal appear-
ance. My new
Model 25 Nose
Shaper is de-
signed to improve
the shape of the
nose by re-mould-
ing the cartilage
and fleshy parts,
safely and pain-
lessly. This is
accomplished
through the very
fine and precise adjustments which only my
patented Model 25 possesses. Results are lasting.
Can be worn at night or during the day. Money
refunded if not satisfied after thirty days' trial.
Write for free booklet.

M. TRILETY, Nose Shaping Specialist,
D120, 45, Hatton Garden, London, E.C.1.

Re-shape Your NOSE

Why have an odd-shaped Nose?
This new scientific Guar-
anteed NOSE-MOLDER will re-
shape your nose as you wish,
while you sleep. Corrects every
type. Try 14 days. If not
delighted, money back.
Complete NOSE-
MOLDER. **5/6**
Ear-Molder **4/4**. Red Nose
Cream **6**. Blackhead Cream **1/6**

Banish STOOP

Look 2 inches taller, be up-
right, expand your chest 2-3
inches, be healthy—by
wearing the **VITALITY**
Shoulder Support. For both
sexes. Undetectable. Money
back guaranteed. **3/9**. **VIT-
ALITY APPLIANCES, 23**
(F.W.), Dean Rd., London,
N.W.2.

Figure 5.3: Adverts for products 'improving' human aesthetics in 'The Feathered World', 1937

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1937 (96(2490):301)

Furthermore, adverts in *The Feathered World* in 1937 for beauty products such as nose-shapers, facial cream, ear-moulders, and shoulder supports illustrate the timelessness of society's obsession with appearances (fig 5.3), stating that "fine and precise adjustments" could be made to "improve", "re-shape", "re-mould", "correct", and "banish" human features (*FW*, 1937 (96(2490):301)). There were, as this chapter reveals, striking parallels between this language and descriptions of fancy pigeon preparation. Fanciers were similarly preoccupied with aesthetics, tailoring and dressing their birds to suit aesthetic preferences. The (re)moulding of fancy pigeon aesthetics, then, mirrored fashion and style in society, fancy pigeons perhaps reflecting the perfect 'beauty' that their fanciers desired for themselves.

Like tightly-laced corsets or hats extravagantly decorated with feathers, however, fancy pigeon breeding bordered on the extreme. In his *Our Fancy Pigeons*, George Ure (1886) criticised "the tendency of mankind to seek for the wonderful rather than the beautiful", appealing to pigeon fanciers to strive for "beauty without excess" (*FW*, 1898 (19(480):281)). In their pursuit of 'beauty' – be it for money, recreation, prestige, or a combination – pigeon fanciers sculpted their birds to suit personal tastes, developing – sometimes to the 'extreme' – intricate aesthetic features. Thus, the breeding, preparation, and exhibition of fancy pigeons, constituted interesting human-animal entanglements – driven by human fashions – in which human and animal lives were made. This chapter will explore the ways in which fancy pigeons were (re)imagined and (re)defined, transformed physically and metaphorically by their encounters with their fanciers.

5.1 Classifying Pigeons

As fancy pigeons grew in popularity, fanciers sought to classify and categorise fancy pigeon breeds. Due to the divergent and varying aesthetics of fancy pigeon varieties, many fanciers believed them to be completely distinct from wild pigeons (Dixon, 1851; Brent, 1859). In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, scientists and ornithologists were gathering evidence to suggest that domesticated and wild varieties were, in fact, the same species. Perhaps the most significant for pigeon fanciers was Charles Darwin and two of his works in particular – *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Variation of Plants and Animals* (1868). Darwin submerged himself in the social world of fancy pigeon exhibition

from 1855 to 1858 – joining two clubs, attending shows, and subscribing to journals – drawing on fancy pigeons to illustrate how selection and domestication moulded Nature. Helped by naturalist William Yarrell, Darwin developed a web of contacts within the Fancy, including William Tegetmeier, Mr Harrison Weir, John Matthews Eaton, and Bernard P. Brent, all of whom he acknowledged in *Variation* (1868:132).

According to an article in *The Feathered World*, “every fancier...[was] well acquainted” with Darwin’s (1868) classification of fancy pigeons, which categorised breeds – or ‘races’ – into four groups, based on their physical characteristics (fig. 5.4) (*FW*, 1903 (28 (708):112)). His first group contained only Pouter varieties, distinguished by their exaggerated crops, whilst the second group – Carriers, Runts, and Barbs – had long “carunculated or wattled” beaks, the skin around their eyes also “carunculated”, forming large ‘ceres’ (Darwin, 1868:139). The third group was defined by their short beaks and small eye ceres, although their feather formations were diverse. Darwin’s final group was “characterised by their resemblance...especially in the beak, to the rock-pigeon”, Darwin (1868:154) admitting, however, that the sub-varieties in this final group were “a few of the most distinct”.

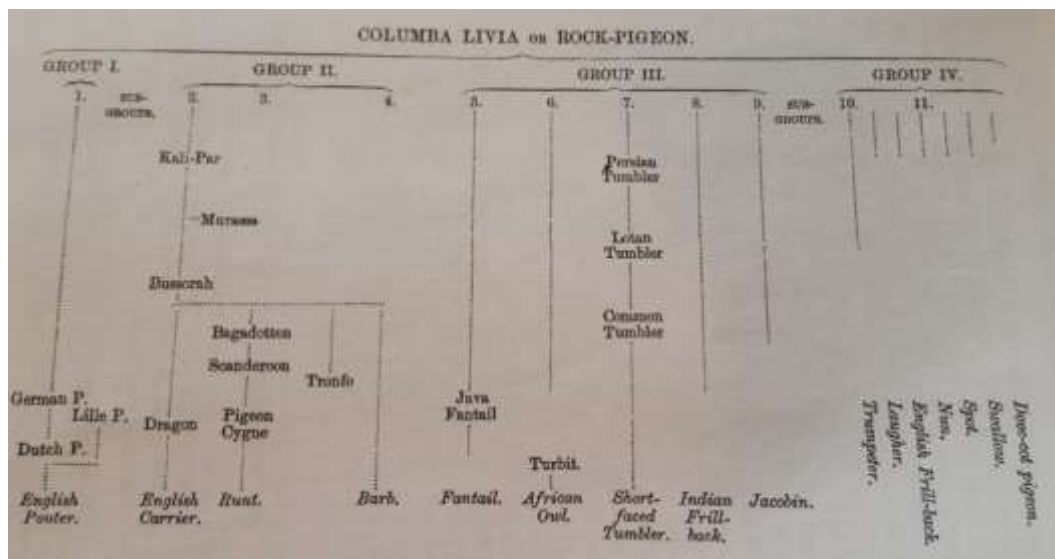


Figure 5.4: Darwin's classification of fancy pigeon breeds, 1868

Source: Darwin (1868:136)

Underpinning Darwin's classification was his 'common ancestor theory', originally proposed in *The Origin of Species* (1859). According to Darwin, all fancy pigeon breeds were, despite their visual diversity, descended from one common ancestor, the Rock Dove (*Columba livia*). William Tegetmeier (1868:15) also published work confirming the Rock Dove as "the origin from whence all our numerous domestic varieties have sprung", which was read by fanciers and scientists alike. Pigeon fanciers writing in *The Feathered World* were, it seems, aware of such work, society in general during the nineteenth century showing a keen interest in popular science (Boyd and McWilliam, 2007). Articles were published by fanciers and scientists explaining its potential relevance, and letters to the paper discussed both the prospects and impossibilities of Darwin's work.

Just as Darwin's theories had caused controversy and debate in both the scientific and popular domains throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century (Sloan, 2000), his common ancestor theory had a mixed reception amongst the Fancy. One fancier explained:

"many fanciers...experienced the same difficulty...in accepting the view that the whole amount of difference between those various breeds and the Rock Pigeon had arisen since the domestication of the latter by man" (*FW*, 1903 (28(708):112)).

Indeed, Darwin (1859:32) himself had acknowledged that "the diversity of the breeds is something astonishing", identifying 288 known fancy pigeon breeds at the time of publishing *Variation* (1868). The early fancy works by Reverend Dixon (1851) and Bernard Brent (1859) both disagreed with ornithological and scientific works, believing that they took for granted similarities between all the fancy varieties. Whilst respecting scientific work, Dixon (1851:84) claimed that "the evidence is wanting". Likewise, despite helping Darwin (1859; 1868) with his enquiries, Brent (1859:78) felt "a great disinclination to assign them one common origin". Naturalist and fancier George Ure (1886) and fancier Reverend Lucas (1886) later also voiced their disagreement with Darwin's theory and, whilst Dixon (1851) and Lucas' (1886) disbeliefs may have stemmed from their religious views, they questioned scientific theories which seemed to down-play the diversity of their fancies. On the other hand, however, a later work by Lyell (1887:404) argued that *The Origin of Species* contained "a great amount of

information most interesting to the pigeon fancier". In 1903, *The Feathered World* reproduced a sketch by Mr Ludlow entitled 'The Rock Dove and Some of its Descendants' (fig. 5.5), suggesting that, perhaps, Darwin's observations on fancy pigeons were becoming more widely accepted amongst the Fancy.



Figure 5.5: "The Rock Dove and Some of its Descendants", 1903: 1. Wild Rock Dove; 2. Frillback; 3. Turbit; 4. Antwerp; 5. Dragoon; 6. Homer; 7. Nun; 8. Carrier; 9. Tippler; 10. Owl; 11. Jacobin; 12. Pouter; 13. Runt; 14. Fantail; 15. Barb; 16. Magpie; 17. Trumpeter

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1903 (28(708):114)

Despite the uncertainty of their birds' origins, fanciers unanimously agreed that humans had a part to play in moulding the appearances of fancy pigeons. Reverend Lumley explained: "varied and manifold indeed is the pigeon tribe, yet none forget that every variety is the result of careful breeding and much patience...in the columbarian craft" (*FW*, 1891 (4(92):219)). Another fancier added that the diversity of fancy pigeon breeds was "entirely due to the skill of the breeder in perpetuating slight variations" (*FW*, 1903 (28(708):112)). Indeed, Charles Darwin (1859:4) remarked that the pigeon fancier "perceives extremely small differences", an acute sense which he termed "the fancier's eye". This fascination with the subtleties of pigeon aesthetics, Darwin argued, was part of mankind's innate tendency to take an interest in, and exploit, novelty. Darwin's work had shown how fancy pigeons were tailored, "pinched and pulled, bustled and bonneted, like the ephemeral female fashions", "cropped and coiffed by man" (Desmond and Moore, 1991:247; 425). He identified two types of selection: 'methodological selection' – conscious selective breeding or skilled craftsmanship – and 'unconscious selection' – unintentional crossings by fanciers or by 'Nature'. "Man...may be said to have been trying an *experiment on a gigantic scale*", Darwin (1868:3) wrote, explaining that, through domestication, humans had accentuated the processes of 'natural selection' and emphasised the mutability of the natural world. He stated: "the key is man's power of accumulative selection: nature gives successive variations; man adds them up in certain directions useful to him" (Darwin, 1859:39).

Pigeon fanciers, then, celebrated the increasingly diverse nature of fancy pigeon breeds and sought to define and categorise them. In books and letters to *The Feathered World*, fanciers regularly grouped and ordered fancy breeds, like Darwin, according to their physical characteristics or aesthetic qualities – such as size, shape, feathering, and markings – attempts at classification differing between fanciers. Figure 5.6, for instance, summarises the categories suggested by Reverend Lumley – grouped differently to Darwin (1868) – in an article in *The Feathered World* in 1891, which, he stated, would be useful to novices.

Category	Example
1. "Pigeons remarkable for <i>greatness of size</i> " (FW, 1891 (4(90):186))	Runt
2. "Pigeons remarkable for singularity of <i>body construction</i> ": (1) "Pigeons capable of increasing or diminishing their proportions" (2) "Pigeons of peculiar spinal construction" (FW, 1891 (4(90):186))	(1) Pouter (2) Fantail
3. "Pigeons dependent on <i>skull formation</i> ": (1) Short-faced (2) Long-faced (FW, 1891 (4(90):186))	(1) Turbit (2) Show Homer
4. "Pigeons remarkable principally for <i>feather arrangement</i> " (1) "Pigeons dependent on both head and foot peculiarities of feather arrangement" (2) "Pigeons of peculiar reversed head and neck feathering" (3) "Pigeons of extensive foot-feathering" (FW, 1891 (4(92):218))	(1) Trumpeter (2) Jacobin (3) Toy breeds
"Pigeons remarkable for <i>singular action</i> " (1) "Peculiar action, combined with its result in voice" (2) "Peculiar action when flying" (3) "Peculiar action on foot" (FW, 1891 (4(92):218))	(1) Laugher (2) Tumbler (3) Fantail

Figure 5.6: Reverend Lumley's classification of fancy pigeon breeds, 1891

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1891 (4(90):186); (4(92):218)

There is some evidence to suggest that fanciers constructed a classificatory hierarchy of fancy breeds. Moore's (1735) *Columbarium* – one of the earliest known pigeon fancying books – referred to the Carrier pigeon as "King of the Pigeons, on account of its beauty and great sagacity" (Moore, 1735:26). Over a century later, authors still labelled the Carrier a 'high class' fancy breed (Brent, 1859; Ure, 1886; Lyell, 1887). In *The Pigeon Book*, Brent (1859:5) divided fancy breeds into two groups: 'all Fancy Pigeons', made up of four 'high' varieties –

Carriers, Tumblers, Pouters, and Runts – and other breeds such as Jacobins, Fantails, Trumpeters, and Barbs; and “the inferior fancy pigeons, or Toys”.

The ‘Toys’ were a group of relatively uncommon breeds, mainly of German origin, which were regularly grouped together by fanciers and at shows, later referred to as ‘Variety pigeons’ and judged in ‘Any Other Variety’ (AOV) classes. Amongst the ‘Toy’ breeds were Shields, Hyacinths, Suabians, Crescents, Priests, Firebacks, Helmets, Lahores, Spots, and Ice Pigeons (fig. 5.7), all united by having “no distinguishing point or property but feather” colour or markings (Brent, 1859:5). This categorisation, whilst practical, homogenised the breeds in question, erasing their differences and individualities. It also devalued them, Brent (1859:5) arguing that if it were not for their colour or markings they would be “simply...Mongrel[s]”. Fulton (1880:343) added that a Toy was “a bird whose properties interpose no natural difficulty to obtaining in the desired combination”. In this hierarchy, then, aesthetic features and the challenge of breeding them framed constructed notions of ‘value’ and ‘beauty’. The category of ‘Toy’, however, was never static, new breeds being incorporated and others, such as the Magpie – so-called because of its markings (see fig. 5.16) – being ‘improved’ sufficiently in features and popularity to earn their own classifications at shows (Fulton, 1880; Lyell, 1887; House, 1920). This fluid group ebbed and flowed, reportedly reaching its “high-tide” in the 1870s, but, by the twentieth century, was “crowded out” (*FW*, 1909 (41(1047):xii)). Breeds went in and out of fashion, or could disappear almost entirely. Some of the breeds mentioned in Moores’ (1735) *Columbarium*, for instance, were not mentioned in later books – such as Uplopers, Finnikins, and Turners – and some were very rare by the late-nineteenth century, such as Horsemen, Laughers, Capuchins, and Mahomets.



Figure 5.7: Examples of ‘Toy’ breeds, 1895: Shield, Hyacinth, and Suabian (top left); Crescent, Priest, and Fireback (top right); Helmet, Lahore, and Spot (bottom left); Ice Pigeons (bottom right)

Sources: Fulton (1895:plates)

5.2 The ‘Art’ of Breeding

Breeding practices were commonly discussed in books and *The Feathered World*, pigeon fanciers physically moulding their birds. Many passionately described their birds as works of ‘art’, breeding methods as ‘artistic’ practices, and themselves as ‘artists’. The title of one of the oldest and most well-regarded books amongst the Fancy illustrates this; *A Treatise on the Art of Breeding and Managing the Almond Tumbler* written by tailor and fancier John Matthews Eaton (1851). According to Ure (1886:83), fancy pigeons were “living pictures...the figures to be correctly drawn, the colours to be beautiful and artistically disposed, so that the result may be a combination of form and colour analogous to the painter’s and sculptor’s art, yet more wonderful than either”. The art of breeding, he explained, was challenging: “the breeder...employs the forces of nature, and his art consists in bringing these under the control of human will”, adding that fanciers were also “student[s] of Nature”, never quite fully gaining control over

natural processes (Ure, 1886:5; 6). Fancy pigeons, then, exposed the permeability of a blurry boundary between art and Nature, between humanly-shaped cultural objects and ‘natural’ subjects.

Like artists, “the beauty of colour” was a chief consideration in fancy pigeon breeding, many descriptions of breeding almost analogous of artists mixing paint (*FW*, 1933 (89(2317):734)). One fancier, for instance, described breeding Almond Tumblers: “with your birds before you and the model in your eye, a dip of this and a dip of that was taken, until by its mixture your ideal becomes realised” (*FW*, 1908 (39(1007):528)). The popular Almond Tumbler breed (fig. 5.8), described by Fulton (1880:137) as “*the* high-class pigeon” and Lucas (1886:77) as one of the “favourites of the fancy”, caused considerable debate surrounding its colour. As the previous chapter explained, the first ever public show – held by the Philoperisteron Society in 1848 – was organised to settle disagreements over the colour of this esteemed breed. The breed’s *Aids to Amateurs* (1908, No.10) collectors’ card, however, interestingly made no mention of the breed’s colour, presumably due to the discrepancies between fanciers.



Figure 5.8: *The Almond Tumbler*, 1908

Source: *Aids to Amateurs*, 1908 (No.10)

For a lot of fanciers, the breed’s plumage was almond-coloured. Moore’s *Columbarian* (1735:39), describes it as “a mixture of three colours [black, white, and yellow], vulgarly call’d an Almond, perhaps from the quantity of Almond

colour'd Feathers that are found in the Hackle". Eaton's (1851:7) *Treatise* on the breed later described the colour as "the inside of the shell of the almond nut", Fulton (1880:138) similarly defining it as "the rich yellow of the shell of an *old* nut, when it has begun to crumble or moulder away" (fig. 5.9). Other fanciers, however, believed the breed resembled ermine fur – speckled black and white – Eaton (1851) identifying eighteenth-century references to the Almond as an 'Ermine Tumbler'. An exhibitor writing to *The Feathered World* in 1914 suggested that the breed resembled more closely 'erminites', another type of heraldic fur, which he described as a "yellow field powdered with black...[ermine] spot[s]...a little red hair on each" (*FW*, 1914 (50(1287):xv)). Nonetheless, the Cope Bros. (1926, No. 24) cigarette card featuring the breed (fig. 5.10) later described the Almond to non-fanciers as:

"rich yellowish brown, as the skin of an almond nut...here and there sundry feathers of a richer chestnut...the whole feathering being flecked with black full plum pudding mixture".

The Almond Tumbler was, then, one of the most popular and yet highly-contested breeds, becoming a battleground for aesthetic preference.



Figure 5.9: Almond Tumblers, 1880 by Ludlow
Source: Fulton (1880:plate)



Figure 5.10: An Almond Tumbler cigarette card, 1926

Source: Cope Bros. (1926) *Pigeons*, No.24

In creating their 'works of art', pigeon fanciers practised close inbreeding and calculated cross-breeding, in order to breed pigeons with specific visible signifiers of 'beauty'. Whilst breeding was an 'art', some of the language used by fanciers also suggests a less romanticised and more utilitarian approach. One fancier, for instance, argued that fanciers' selective breeding practices were "unnatural", a means of "trimming the birds to suit the popular tastes" (*FW*, 1895 (13(323):209)). Breeding records were kept and "mating up on paper" practised, fanciers regularly stressing the importance of pedigree, 'purity', and 'blood' to a bird's perceived 'value' (*FW*, 1933 (88(2274):1015)). Ure (1886:118) wrote: "only *old blood* will tell...unless he [a pigeon] is from a good old-established strain he will not transmit his excellencies to any great or reliable extent". Ure (1886:118) believed in keeping the 'blood' "as pure as possible", avoiding "underbred contamination" from cross-breeding, which he criticised as "decadence or taste for mongrelism" (Ure, 1886:88). A lot of birds were, in fact, closely inbred, despite fanciers being aware of the potential detrimental health effects. A regular contributor to *The Feathered World*, however, in 1930, argued that pigeon exhibitors did "not take enough notice of pedigree, and are very much inclined to mate on face value" (*FW*, 1930 (83(2166):1015)).

A practice that was discussed a lot in the pages of *The Feathered World* was 'colour breeding', experimental and calculated attempts to breed particular colours in birds. In pigeon breeding, there were, one fancier stated, "three principal pigments...known as the artists' primaries" – red, blue and yellow – "from which you can obtain almost any other colour" (*FW*, 1920 (62(1610):459)). Colours were products of fanciers' aesthetic tastes, new colours constantly being created and existing colours altered. Those colours that were harder to 'perfect' were more highly valued by pigeon fanciers, due to the challenge it presented them. Fanciers acknowledged, however, that it was "difficult to give a recipe for the production of good-coloured birds" (*FW*, 1905 (32(823):693)). Colours regularly came under "severe criticism", language such as 'defect' and 'blemish' used to describe 'mismarked' birds, as opposed to 'clean' birds (*FW*, 1927 (76(1974):643)). One fancier even likened mismarking to a disease, an "abomination...very hard to cure" (*FW*, 1914 (51(1287):xiv)).

Through this attention to colour breeding, however, fanciers also became enmeshed in scientific debates about breeding and inheritance. A paper read by fancier Mr Pitts to the National Peristeronic Society, in 1920, drew on eugenicist Sir Francis Galton's 'Law of Heredity', arguing that colour was "solely hereditary" rather than, as some fanciers believed, indicative of 'vigour' (*FW*, 1920 (62(1610):376)). These "want of vigour colour theorists", Pitts explained, believed – wrongly, he felt – that dun or yellow birds lacked vitality, whilst red, black, or blue birds were healthy and energetic (*FW*, 1920 (62(1610):376)). Whilst there were certain parallels with Mendelism, this was rarely discussed in *The Feathered World*, and it is not clear whether pigeon fanciers fully understood its principles. One regular contributor to the paper stated that Mendel's observations of pea plant inheritance in the 1860s could be "applied possibly – very possibly – from a practical point of view...taken, as the Darwinian theory, as a theory, and to be applied by each individual fancier, or shall I say student, in the way in which it most appeals to them" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1163):497)). Another fancier, however, believed that due to the unknown "unnumbered ancestors" of a lot of fancy birds, there was no way of applying Mendelian laws strictly (*FW*, 1931 (84(2178):519)). The difficulty in equating external appearances with the internal make-up of fancy pigeons was, then, a barrier to pigeon fanciers, but it also added to the 'challenge' – and, most likely, the pleasure – of the pastime.

There is, therefore, little evidence of fanciers following scientific laws in their breeding, nor did they necessarily *need* to adopt such methods in order to achieve their goals. Whilst aware of potentially relevant scientific work, fanciers relied on their own experiences and invaluable knowledge that they had acquired, being thorough and methodological in their breeding. For fanciers, the science – and, indeed, art – to pigeon fancying came in the planning, monitoring, and experimentation of breeding.

5.2.1 The Pursuit of ‘Perfection’

Many letters and articles in *The Feathered World* affectionately referred to fancy pigeons as ‘pets’. Ure (1886:4), however, differentiated pigeon fanciers from nineteenth-century pet-keepers as:

“more intelligent and ambitious...whose distinguishing characteristic...is that seeing pet animals are to them a source of happiness, they are determined to have them as perfect and beautiful as possible”.

Fulton (1880:2), also referring to fancy pigeons as ‘pets’, further explained the importance of ‘beauty’ in pigeon fancying, comparing the pastime to flower cultivation:

“like the florist, the pigeon-fancier seeks to develop what he calls the ‘beauties’ of his pets...to the true fancier his pigeons are just such beautiful, rare – *living flowers*”.

Indeed, ‘beauties’ was an oft-used synonym for fancy pigeons in books and *The Feathered World*, emphasising fanciers’ visual pleasure. Reverend Lucas (1886:20) argued that the pigeon fancier’s obsession with appearances made him “apt to be a vain man”, but, he added, the fancier was also “vain of his success...he may even give vent to a little brag on occasion”. Thus, success in the show pen elevated fanciers’ reputations, each victory pieced together to create patchwork identities. Beautiful birds, then, were very closely associated with – and reflected – skilful fanciers.

Reports, letters, and articles in *The Feathered World* regularly used words such as ‘charming’, ‘extraordinary’, ‘elegant’, ‘grand’, ‘graceful’, ‘splendid’, ‘wonderful’, and ‘fascinating’ to describe birds, fanciers habitually using indulgent and passionate language. The President of the Manchester Columbarian Society, in 1897, remarked that some reports contained “adjectives such as fizzing, spanking, etc., words...more appropriate to wine or the treatment of schoolboys than applicable to pigeons” (*FW*, 1897 (17(424):144)). In the 1908 Crystal Palace Show report, for instance, the Pouters were described as “real fashion plates”, the Dragoons as “wonderfully near perfection”, the Jacobins as “a feast for the gods”, and the Magpies as “a brilliant display” (*FW*, 1909 (40(1026):397)). The report also anthropomorphised some breeds, the Short-faced Tumblers, for instance, described as “quaint pigeons...the comics, as their dainty little ways and innocent expression appeal”, whilst the Exhibition Homers were “watching you with that keenness of expression only found in birds of intelligence” (*FW*, 1909 (40(1026):397; 398)). In contrast, the reports of smaller shows, which were allocated less space in the paper, gave more concise – and, arguably, more practical – aesthetic descriptions of the winning birds. Reverend Lumley’s report of the 1889 Bagshot Show, for instance, described the winning Short-faced Tumbler as “good knobbed almond...getting too dark...twists in beak”, whilst second-place was “a nice grounded little almond, with good skull”, third was a “large knobbed almond...too dark and puffy in eye”, and fourth was “nice yellow, light” (*FW*, 1889 (1(2):29)). Visible aesthetic features, then, were the main signifiers of fancy pigeons. Show reports, however, usually de-individualised fancy pigeons by providing no means of identifying them, stating the names of the exhibitors but rarely including the birds’ ring numbers. In contrast, *in the loft* fancy pigeons were individualised and distinguished, sometimes referred to by their ring numbers, or alternatively given pet-like names – such as ‘Fluffy’, ‘Bobby’, or ‘Daisy’ – or descriptive names denoting their aesthetics – such as ‘Butterscotch’, ‘Spectacle’, or ‘Beauty’.

Whilst celebrating beauty, fanciers were also keen to condemn disfigurement or, what they termed, ‘faults’. Lucas (1886:14) described pigeon fancying as “the art of propagating life”, but, conversely, it also involved the *termination* of life. Most fanciers practised annual ‘weeding out’, in which, Honorary Secretary of the Pigeon Club Mr Burgess explained, “surplus birds of inferior quality, whose presence is a hindrance to others of superior merit” were killed (*FW*, 1907

(37(955):481)). He called this “disposing of wasters” and, whilst it is not clear what proportion of birds were culled, the practice was regularly recommended in *The Feathered World* (FW, 1907 (37(955):481)). Other fanciers ‘disposed’ of their birds in more compassionate ways, giving them away to others for use in breeding or to be kept as pets, or detaching themselves from the act of killing by giving them to a poulterer. Nonetheless, whilst the paper recommended controlling the loft population, there was little detail of how this was generally carried out. The birds that made it to the show pen, then, represented only a selection of the birds bred and kept by fanciers. Fanciers were practical, referring to the ‘waste’ of money, time, food, and space in keeping too many birds. The language of show reports also hinted at this practical – or, perhaps, ruthless – approach, one report, for instance, calling the Barbs at the 1895 Altrincham Show “abortions” which should be “annihilated” (FW, 1895 (13(327):298)). ‘Imperfect’ pigeons, then, were seen as disposable, although they were not entirely disregarded. Like a farmer with their livestock, pigeon fanciers demonstrated emotional attachment as well as detachment, caring for and respecting their birds, but remaining pragmatic in their attempts to breed ‘perfection’.

Linked to ‘perfection’ were ‘improvement’ and ‘progress’. Similar to livestock breeders aiming to breed ‘improved’ animals for produce and profit, pigeon fanciers sought to breed aesthetically ‘improved’ pigeons to win shows, their reputations – and pockets – profiting. They measured progress and improvement in three main ways: growth in popularity of a breed; increased numbers of individuals nearing a breed’s standard; and physical changes reproduced across all individuals of a breed. Aesthetic tastes, however, meant that the extent to which breeds had improved or progressed was subjective, a theme which will be developed in the next section. Nonetheless, key to this idea of ‘perfection’ was, fanciers agreed, its impossibility. Fulton (1880:1) emphasised this, defining pigeon showing as:

“the cultivation and pursuit of *ideal beauty* in its highest forms...the constant effort to approach a standard of perfection impossible of attainment...progress, ever approaching completion, yet never completed”.

Thus, fanciers knew that ‘perfection’ was an unobtainable state of ‘beauty’ dictated by impossible aesthetics, although rather than making their efforts futile, the challenge of achieving it made the pastime all the more alluring, one fancier stating: “it is human nature to value most that which is farthest from one’s grasp” (*FW*, 1905 (32(816):231)). House (1920:xiv) explained:

“this is where the great charm of the Fancy lies. Perfection is the goal, but as we near the goal our ideal becomes higher, we see points which need refining which we had previously overlooked, and thus the object of our ambition is kept form our reach”.

By privileging the idea of ‘progress’ and an imaginary future ‘ideal’, fanciers’ practices were limitless. The birds that existed, then, like the tip of an iceberg, only represented a fraction of the pastime’s possibilities, a clue to the birds of the future.

As this discussion shows, then, pigeon fanciers’ desire to cultivate ‘perfection’ and breed out ‘faults’ in their feathered fancies is strikingly similar to the motivations, aims, and language used in eugenics. Pioneered by Sir Francis Galton in the 1880s – strongly influenced by the work of his cousin, Charles Darwin – eugenics sought to manipulate natural selection in *humans*, an active intervention in human populations through the application of theories of heredity (Bashford and Levine, 2010). Human bodies – like fancy pigeons – were classified and measured, anthropologists and naturalists recording human characteristics in scientific papers and through the use of anthropometric photography (Bashford and Levine, 2010; Sera-Shriar, 2015). Mixing science and social movement, proponents of eugenics advocated ‘improvement’ and ‘impairment’ projects, classifying some human life – based on class, race, and mental or physical ability – as more valuable than others (Bashford and Levine, 2010). Thus, like pigeon fanciers, this movement was driven by the promise of improvement and perfectibility, the benefits of planning selection, and the desire to manipulate and standardise populations – discussed in the next sections – raising considerable ethical and moral questions.

5.3 Standardising Aesthetics

Breed standards, as attempts at institutionalising and standardising pigeon aesthetics, (re)defined ‘perfection’ and ‘beauty’ and were used by fanciers as instructive tools in breeding and judging fancy pigeons. Referred to as ‘standards of excellence’ or ‘standards of perfection’, they were compiled by breed clubs, show committees, and the Pigeon Club. As a result, multiple standards often existed simultaneously for breeds, creating ambiguity. They were “published for the welfare of the Fancy”, circulated amongst club members, and reproduced in books and the pigeon press (*FW*, 1911 (45(1150):x)).

According to pigeon fanciers, one of the first known standards was published by the Columbarian Society, in 1764 (fig. 5.11). The standard laid out ‘perfections’ and ‘imperfections’ of the Almond Tumbler according to three criteria: feather colour, head characteristics, and body shape. Standards were produced intermittently until, in the 1880s, the formation of specialist breed clubs gave momentum to the idea of producing ‘ideal’ specimens of each breed, the Pigeon Club arguing that breed standards would help “preserve birds of the right type” (*FW*, 1901 (25(650):925)).

ORDINANCES ESTABLISHED BY THE COLUMBARIAN SOCIETY, AT THE GLOBE TAVERN, FLEET STREET, respecting the PERFECTIONS OR IMPERFECTIONS OF ALMOND OR ERMIN TUMBLERS. 1764.	
PERFECTIONS.	IMPERFECTIONS.
I. <i>Feather.</i> Consists of three colours, viz., Black, White, and Yellow, intermixed, or variously and richly displayed. Ground, the best Yellow. The Rump, Yellow and Spangled. Tail, the most Yellow and striped.	I. <i>Feather.</i> Ash Colour, or Blue, Barr'd on the Flight.
II. <i>Head.</i> To be Round and Small. The Forehead, High. The Beak, Short and Small. The Eye, a bright pearl colour round the Pupil.	II. <i>Head.</i> Thin, Long Snouted. Beak, Long and Thick. Eye, all Black or Red, or broken colour.
III. <i>Shape.</i> A Small Body, Prominent Chest, and Good Symetry.	III. <i>Shape.</i> Long Body. Large, with Small Chest.
IMPERFECTIONS INADMISSIBLE AT A SHEW FOR THE PRIZE. Blue Ermins, Ermins with entire blue tails, and Ash coloured Ermins.	

Figure 5.11: The Almond Tumbler Standard published by the Columbarian Society in 1764

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1914 (50(1287):xv)

From the end of the nineteenth century, standards for each breed consisted of a written description of the aesthetic features of a hypothetical 'ideal' specimen, defining distinct breed identities (fig. 5.12). Whilst cocks and hens were judged separately, each breed had only one standard, applied to both. Standards also included a scale of points allocated to each feature of the breed, which showed the maximum number of points that judges could award – and, thus, indicated the relative importance of – different features. In adopting a points system, fanciers attempted to make objective judgements about their birds' appearances, but this was, nonetheless, still a very subjective method of assessment. Some standards stated precise measurements for birds' features, suggesting a more controlled aesthetic assessment. A standard for the Dragoon at the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, stated that the beak should be 1 ½ inches long, whilst its body should measure "15 inches from tip of beak to end of tail...4 ½ inches across shoulders" (Fulton, 1895:281). From the sources consulted, however, judges do not appear to have measured exhibits at shows. Standards were also regularly accompanied by sketches of the 'ideal', sometimes labelled (fig. 5.12), acting as teaching aids to fanciers. This mapped out the topography of a breed's corporeality, portraying pigeons as products of mathematical formulae and scientific calculation, which could be (re)moulded to their fanciers' desires (fig. 5.13). *The Feathered World* often published illustrations of 'ideal' specimens as frontispieces, colour supplements, or collectible *Aids to Amateurs* cards, images which were admired for their 'perfect' and 'beautiful' aesthetics.

POINTS AND STANDARD OF THE ANTWERP CLUB.	
Beak, stoutness and evenness between upper and lower mandibles	20
Wattle to be pretty large, but smooth and well sprodden and leaf-like, with fulness of jew wattle	10
Front of face, height, width, with fulness of cheek between eye and wattle	20
Height over eye and back skull	15
Eye to be blood red and large	5
Cere to be dark and fine as possible	5
Fulness of throat, showing no gullet	5
Neck to be nice and thin, with bold and prominent chest.	5
Size and carriage	5
Colour	10
	<hr/> 100

One type to be observed for all three varieties.

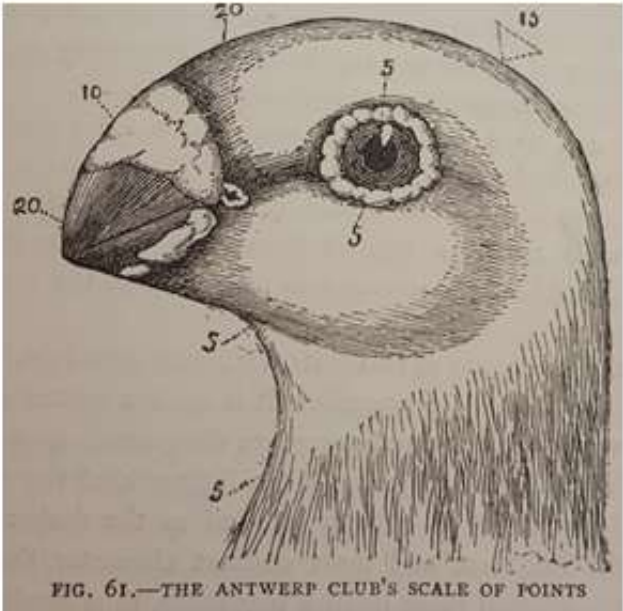


FIG. 61.—THE ANTWERP CLUB'S SCALE OF POINTS

Figure 5.12: The Antwerp Club Standard, 1895
Source: Fulton (1895:425; 417)

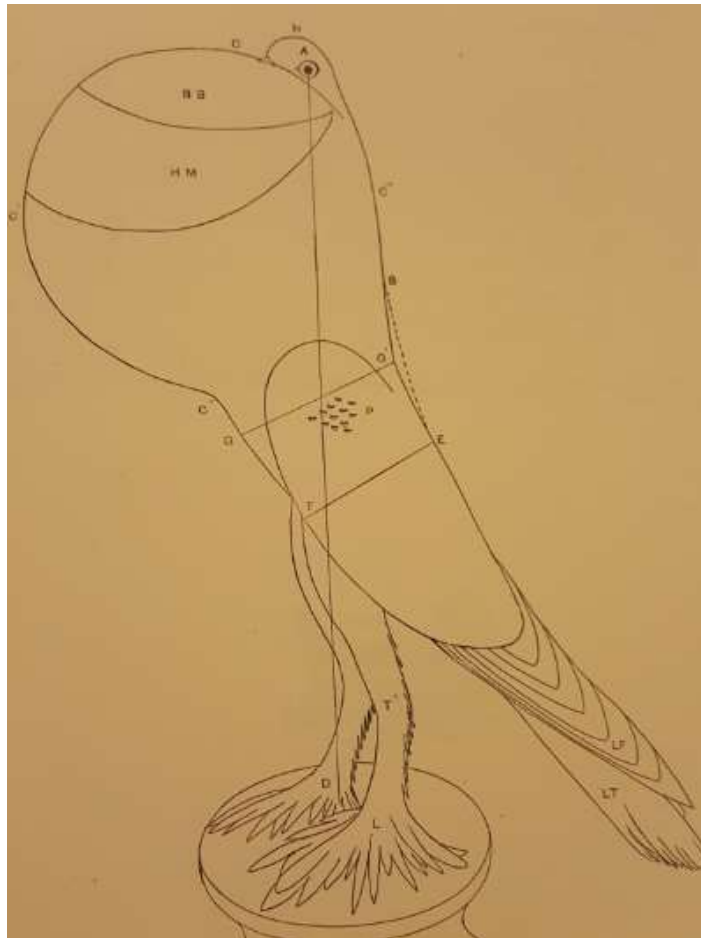


Figure 5.13: "Points of the Pouter", 1880

Source: Fulton (1880:133)

However, letters to *The Feathered World* expressed concern that the 'ideal' specimen, defined by the standard, and the 'true' specimen in real-life were not the same: "real birds" versus "dummy articles" or "shop models" (*FW*, 1893 (8(202):355)). Indeed, Ure (1886:83) criticised standards as "puerile follies", calling the idea of assigning numbers to 'beauty' an "absurdity". The 'ideal', one fancier condemned, was "a certain type to model from in accordance with mechanical rules, but generally destitute of easy grace and true beauty" (*FW*, 1893 (8(202):355)). Some fanciers, then, expressed concern that the 'beauty' of pigeons' aesthetics was being lost, Ure (1886:146) stating that fanciers "hanker[ed] after the monstrous, the grotesque, and abominably hideous". A regular contributor to *The Feathered World*, remarked on "how little real beauty appeals to many fanciers", accusing breed standards of encouraging "disgusting abnormalities...a corruption of the beautiful" (*FW*, 1909 (40(1026):396)). Thus,

as identified earlier, there was a strong parallel with women's fashion at the time, the use of feathers – or sometimes whole birds – to decorate clothing and hats similarly subjected to moral critique, and criticised as eccentric or absurd (Bernstein, 2007; Pacault and Patchett, 2016).

Other fanciers accused standards of making fancy pigeons appear 'fixed', implying that "perfection has been attained and that there is nothing more to be done" (*FW*, 1893 (8(202):355)). Since pigeon fanciers relished trying to achieve impossible 'ideals', standards represented an almost mythical specimen, a future bird that challenged their abilities. One fancier explained: "we want something difficult; the more difficult the better!" (*FW*, 1910 (43(1099:71)). Fancy pigeons, then, were cultural constructs, imaginary ideals, and products of ambition, competition, and taste.

5.3.1 The Caprices of Pigeon Fanciers

Whilst by the 1890s most of the popular breeds had standards, it was "next to impossible to ascertain the standard", one exhibitor wrote, due to the "diversity of type" in fanciers' tastes and judges' preferences (*FW*, 1891 (4(89):174)). The idea of 'taste' was also an important part of wider society at the time, nineteenth-century art critic Walter Hamilton (1844-1899) stating:

"there is no strict mathematical definition or science of beauty in nature, art, poetry or music...beauty...is relative to the tastes and faculties brought to bear upon [them]" (Hamilton, 1882:viii).

One example in particular hints at the geographies of fanciers' aesthetic tastes. In 1888, the United Show Homer Club was established due to claims that the existing Show Homer Club (est. 1886) favoured northern fanciers, neglecting the "southern portion of the Fancy" (*FW*, 1910 (43(1098):x)). An editorial in 1891 lamented that the clubs had yet to amalgamate, the Show Homer fancy divided over geographical differences in aesthetic taste: "at present the southern fanciers favour one type, while the northern fanciers favour another" (*FW*, 1891 (4(84):85)). Both clubs had their own standards, thus standardising regional tastes in Show Homer aesthetics. Show Homers in the north of England were larger and sturdier, "getting their substance from the Antwerp", whilst those in

the south had had “a good deal of long-face black Tumbler in their crossing” to improve colour and facial features (*FW*, 1911 (45(1152):74)). However, writing in 1914, renowned Show Homer fancier and NPS President Mr Lovell suggested: “it is not a question of a northern type and a southern type, as some would have us believe, but simply that we as judges lay too much stress on our own pet point” (*FW*, 1914 (50(1287):xiii)). Whilst multiple standards existed for most breeds, this is the only example found where fanciers believed there to be explicitly *geographical* differences in their tastes.

Due to differences in taste, fancy pigeon standards were regularly debated in *The Feathered World* and at club meetings, their attempts at organisation and standardisation challenged. Fanciers “delight[ed] in arguing and quarrelling over standards” (*FW*, 1909 (40(1026):396)) and, as a result, “the standard and type of nearly every variety of pigeon...[was] met with some alteration with a view of bringing it to a higher state of perfection” (*FW*, 1907 (37(960):723)). Pigeons were constantly under scrutiny, one fancier explaining: “you can fault the best living unfortunately” (*FW*, 1914 (50(1285):262)). In 1925, NPS President Mr Holmes admitted that fanciers had always been “apt to get distorted ideas about the beauty or otherwise of purely fancy points” (*FW*, 1925 (72(1865):491)). Thus, standards were ephemeral, regularly being revised, and constantly redefining fancy pigeons.

In 1899, the Turbit Club tried a “novel experiment”, in which it attempted to utilise the diversity of fanciers’ tastes (*FW*, 1905 (32(818):395)). Secretary Mr Scatliff explained: “it was decided to send a copy of the standard to every member of the club, with the request that he should put into figures what value he attached to the various points...and an average was taken” (*FW*, 1905 (32(818):395)). Figure 5.14 shows a comparison of points between the 1899 ‘average’ standard and the Club’s “thoroughly revised” 1903 standard (*FW*, 1905 (32(819):454)). The biggest difference was a decrease in points awarded to the head, from 19 in 1899 to 10 in 1903, which saw the beak replace the head as the breed’s most valued feature. The 1903 standard added extra detail to the beak classification, ‘beak setting and sweep’ becoming the most important feature, and 25 points in total being awarded to the beak. Another notable change was the emphasis given to size and markings; originally ranked fourth and sixth

respectively in 1899, by 1903 they were both equal second, along with head and beak.

Feature	1899 'average' standard		1903 Turbit Club standard	
	<i>Points</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Points</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Head	19	1	10	=2
Beak	15	2	10	=2
Beak setting and sweep	-	-	15	1
Colour	11	3	10	=2
Size	10	4	10	=2
Gullet	9	5	8	=7
Peak	8	=6	8	=7
Markings	8	=6	10	=2
Eye	6	=8	5	=10
Frill	6	=8	6	9
Wattle	5	=10	5	=10
Legs	3	11	3	12
Total	100		100	

Figure 5.14: Turbit Club standards, 1899 and 1903

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1905 (32(818):395-6); (32(819):454)

The 1903 Turbit Club standard remained relatively unaltered throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the breed's *Aids to Amateurs* card (1910, No.18) stating that the standard still allotted 25 points "to the beak and its setting and sweep". However, following the publication of the 1903 standard, Turbit fanciers wrote to *The Feathered World* expressing their uncertainty due to the "multiplicity of types" seen in the show pen (*FW*, 1903 (28(708):109)). Many of these letters were accompanied by sketches (fig. 5.15), illustrating the diversity of opinions, the head in particular causing "the greatest controversy" (*FW*, 1905 (32(811):3)). A Cope Bros. (1926, No.15) cigarette card later explained to the public that, in general, the breed's "forehead should be full, the cheeks full, the eye large...The crest...central". This example shows that standards were important tools in constructing breed identities, but that, due to differing interpretations, these identities were mutable and contested.

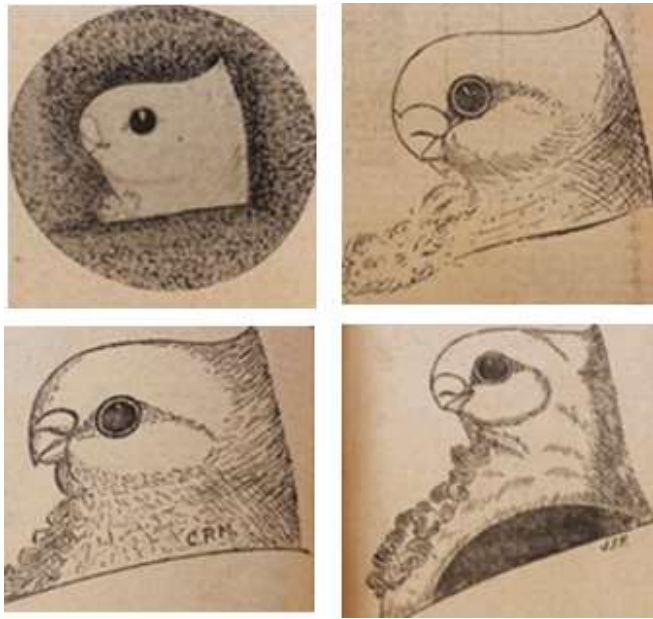


Figure 5.15: "Ideal Turbit"; different fanciers' interpretations, 1903
 Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1903 (28(708):109); (28(715):525);
 (28(718):674); (28(721):817)).

Continually-changing standards, personal tastes, and fashions metaphorically transformed fancy pigeons, discursively constructing breed identities. Pigeons' bodies were, however, also *physically* transformed by breeding practices, as Darwin identified, by the role of human selection in aesthetically manipulating domestic pigeons. "Breeders habitually speak of an animal's organisation as something plastic", Darwin (1859:39) explained, "which they can model almost as they please". Descriptions of birds by fanciers regularly stressed the mutability of pigeons, portraying them as ever-evolving, and showing how fanciers could exploit minute irregularities in individuals to sculpt changes across a whole breed. Figure 5.16, for instance, shows the example of the Magpie, a fancy breed – originally classed as a 'Toy' breed – whose appearance was significantly transformed by breeding for length of leg, face, and neck. The notion of 'breed', then, was an imaginative – rather than taxonomic – category, a contingent human designation, created, (re)defined, and transformed by breed standards and breeding practices.



Figure 5.16: Transformation of the Magpie, 1880, 1895, 1908, and 1920

Sources: Fulton (1880:plate); Fulton (1895: plate); *Aids to Amateurs* 1908 (No. 1); *The Feathered World*, 1920 (63(1630):111)

Fanciers regularly identified and debated such physical transformations to breeds. In a further example, the distinctive feather formation around the head of the Jacobin was subject to scrutiny. Mr Ludlow's sketches (fig. 5.17) in *The Feathered World* showed how the breed's feather formation "began simply as a 'tuft'", in the 1850s, and "increased in size and length of feather, until it assumed the 'hood', 'mane' and 'chain'", almost completely covering the breed's face by the twentieth century (*FW*, 1908 (39(1007):528)). This was what the standard specified, Fulton (1880:247) labelling Jacobins without such feathering as "faulty". Ure (1886:x), however, criticised this exaggerated feathering as "barbarism", calling the new type "mongrels". Photographs from the 1930s (fig. 5.18), nevertheless, suggest that the fashion for 'full' feathering had continued.



Figure 5.17: Ludlow's "Ancient Jacobin" (1850s) (left) and "Modern Jacobin" (1908) (right)

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1908 (39(1007):528)

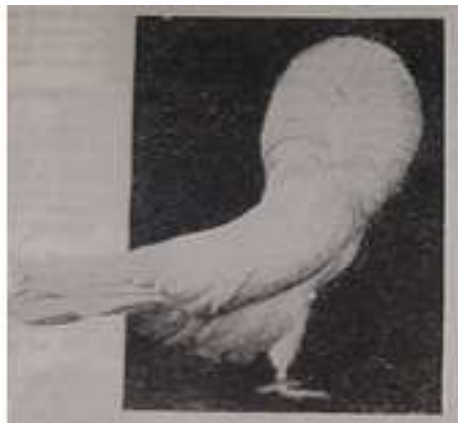


Figure 5.18: Jacobins in the 1930s

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1930 (83(2166):1015); *The Feathered World Yearbook* (1937:269)

A further consequence of selective breeding was the creation of new breeds or sub-breeds. The Show Antwerp, for instance, Fulton (1880) explained, originally existed as a single short-faced variety. However, by the time of his second edition, Fulton (1895) identified two other types of Show Antwerp – ‘Medium-faced’ and ‘Long-faced’ (fig. 5.19) – bred by selecting birds with different head shapes and beak lengths.

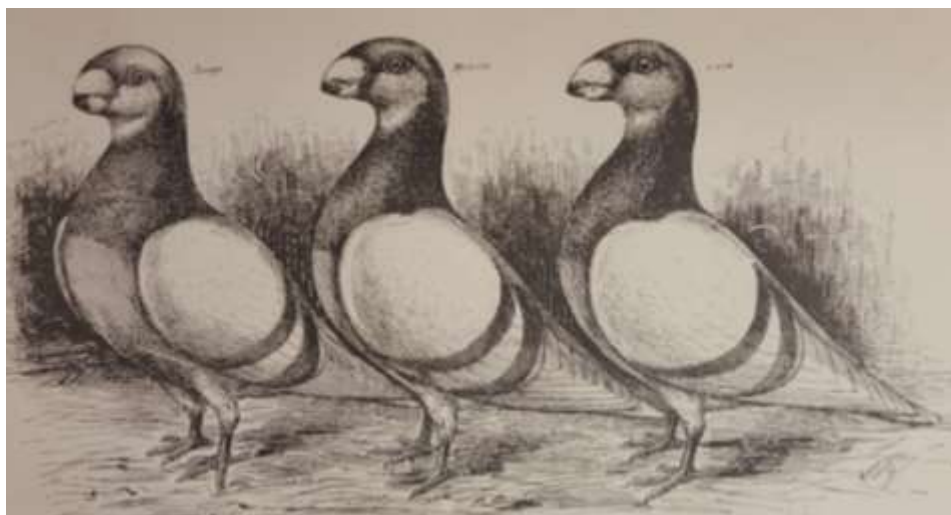


Figure 5.19: “The Antwerp Club’s Types”: Short-, Medium-, and Long-faced, 1895

Source: Fulton (1895:415)

Another breed that underwent high-profile transformation was the Fantail. In the nineteenth century, Fulton (1880) stated, two separate ‘ideals’ existed for Fantails – the Scotch Fantail and the English Fantail (fig. 5.20) – Ure (1886:162)

identifying a “battle of rival styles”. A Cope Bros. (1926, No.10) cigarette card made this distinction to the public: the English was “a larger bird...tail being the chief aim, as large as possible”, whilst the Scotch was “smaller, more compact in body and more eccentric in its movements. Chest...thrown upwards and head downwards...Tail...large and fully outspread”.



Figure 5.20: The Scotch Fantail (left) and the English Fantail (right), 1880

Source: Fulton (1880:plates)

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, a cross between the two Fantails had been created (fig. 5.21), a reportedly “happy blending of the charming action of the little Scottish bird with the somewhat larger but superb [English] bird” (*FW*, 1907 (36(927):603)). One Fantail fancier called the new breed a “so-called modern type”, or “new departure”, claiming that it had a more “up-to-date” or even “ultra date” upright pose (*FW*, 1898 (19(480):281)). This and similar debates in *The Feathered World* illustrate both fanciers’ desire for precision and perfection, and the mutability of tastes and fashions.



Figure 5.21: *The Fantail*, 1909

Source: *Aids to Amateurs*, 1909 (No.14)

Fanciers were aware of, as one fancier put it, “fashion...[and] it’s erratic whims”, letters and articles in the paper warning against “transient craze[s] for one special property”, what fanciers called ‘one-point breeding’ (*FW*, 1898 (19(497):1009)). This practice involved breeding focused on ‘improving’ one particular aesthetic quality, and was condemned by many as detrimental, with the potential to “set back many a variety” (*FW*, 1898 (19(480):281)). In one-point breeding, NPS President – and well-regarded Dragoon fancier – Mr Daniels explained, fanciers “invariably sacrifice[d] some other and often more important property that has probably taken many generations of fanciers to establish”, criticising the practice as impatient, “bad taste or eccentricity” (*FW*, 1907 (36(925):491)). Fanciers in the early-twentieth century preferred “birds excellent in all-round properties, yet excessive in none”, thus echoing George Ure’s (1886) earlier criticism of ‘excess’ (*FW*, 1911 (45(1171):910)).

The example of one-point breeding that received the most coverage in *The Feathered World* involved the popular Show Homer breed. Mr Fellowes, shortly before becoming Pigeon Club Vice-President, stated that he had “noticed not only the increase in size, but also the gradual lengthening of face and beak” in Show

Homers since the mid-1890s (*FW*, 1900 (22(553):164)). The original standard written by the Show Homer Club had, in fact, prioritised the head, beak, and body, leading fanciers to breed birds specifically for these features. To do so, Fellowes explained, fanciers cross-bred their Show Homers with Antwerps – to increase body size – and Scandaroons – to ‘improve’ head and beak shape (fig. 5.22). Some felt, however, that the breed had developed to an “abnormal size” (*FW*, 1900 (22(553):164)). Respected Show Homer fancier – and later Secretary of the Pigeon Club – Mr Burgess described this as an “unauthorised change of type” (*FW*, 1900 (22(554):319)). The breed’s *Aids to Amateurs* card (1908, No.6) explained that here had been a trade-off between size and ‘quality’:

“large birds have a tendency to grow rough and coarse wattles and ceres, long broad tails, and long wing feathers, usually lacking that beautiful quality and neat finish which are absolutely necessary for a perfect specimen”.

Thus, as Darwin (1868:158) had stated: “fanciers notice and select only those slight differences which are externally visible; but the whole organisation is so tied together by correlation of growth, that a change in one part is frequently accompanied by other changes”.

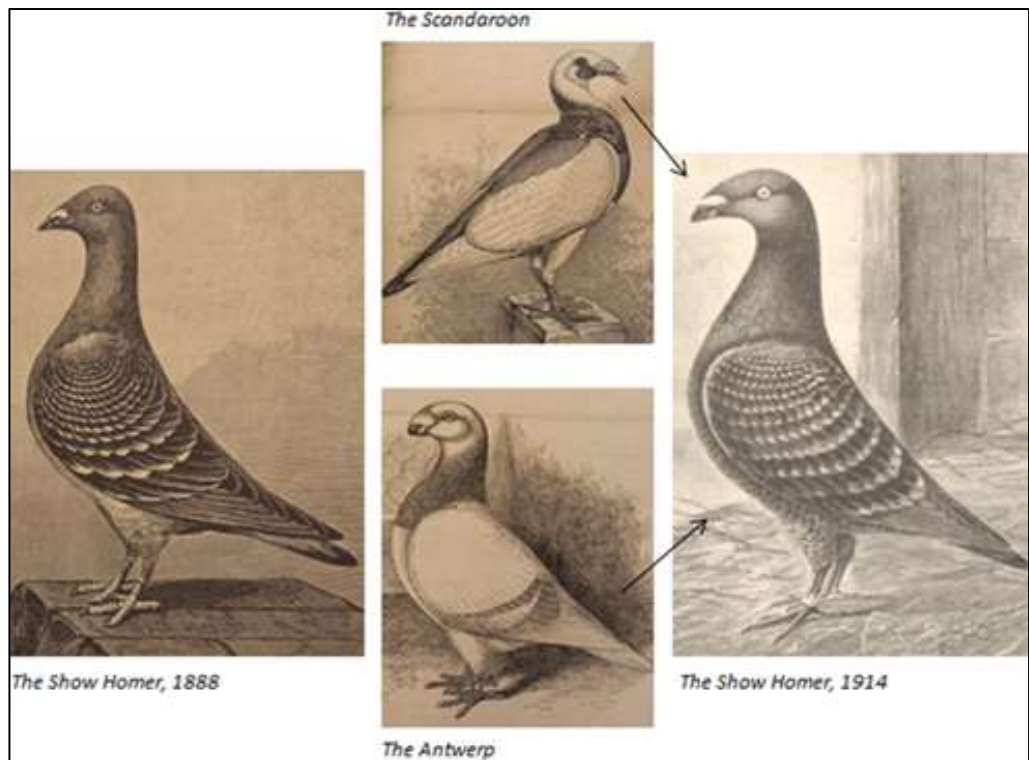


Figure 5.22: The Evolution of the Show Homer: [Clockwise] An early "United Show Homer Club Ideal, 1888"; Scandaroon featured on "The Feathered World's" cover, 1893; "The Ideal Show Homer" adopted by the USHC, 1914; Medium-faced Antwerp featured on "The Feathered World's" cover, 1909
Sources: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1908 (21(1049):734); *The Feathered World*, 1893 (8(192):cover); *The Feathered World*, 1914 (50(1287):xiii); *The Feathered World*, 1909 (41(1052):cover)

It was, in fact, a fascination with fancy points that had led to the origin of the Show Homer as a fancy breed, what fanciers referred to as the "showing craze" (*FW*, 1913 (48(1234):viii)). The breed, fanciers explained, was a modified racing bird, created by introducing "blood calculated to depreciate the Homer as a worker for the purpose of creating a show bird" (*FW*, 1913 (48(1245):xii)). When the Show Homer Club was established, in 1886, the breed was, in fact, still a proficient flier, but, NPS President Mr Lovell stated, "in twelve months' time it had changed very much", becoming "even farther removed from its ancestors than is man from the higher ape" (*FW*, 1913 (48(1245):xiv)). There had, therefore, been another 'trade-off' in the establishment of the breed, athleticism scarified for 'beauty'.

This was, however, not the only example of a racing breed transformed – and its ability lost – by aesthetic tastes, others including Dragoons, Carriers, and Antwerps. One of the most influential figures in long-distance pigeon racing,

Alfred Osman (1910:148) (see Chapter 6), explained: “variety after variety of pigeons has been taken up for utility, only to be spoiled by the craze for showing”. Darwin’s (1868) *Variation* had, in fact, shown how the disuse of animals’ abilities could lead to their deterioration. Bred for fancy points, the neglect of birds’ flying and homing abilities had, therefore, meant that they had lost these traits. A letter to *The Feathered World* wrote: “the breeders of fancy points have been more or less in conflict with fanciers who followed working varieties through all times” (*FW*, 1913 (48(1234):vii). The letter was accompanied by a diagram illustrating the working ‘parent stock’ and their fancy ‘off shoots’ (fig. 5.23). The diagram showed the evolution of the racing pigeon – from its origins as the Roman Carrier pigeon to the modern-day ‘amalgam’, the Flying Homer (see Chapter 7) – and identified the fancy breeds ‘created’ by breeding racing varieties specifically for aesthetic features (fig. 5.23).



Figure 5.23: The descent of fancy breeds developed from working ‘parent stock’

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (48(1234):viii)

The diagram’s final variety of ‘show offshoots’ was termed “others in the making”, hinting at the infinite possibilities in fancy pigeon breeding. This was, however, also a criticism of what the fancier termed the “show malady” (*FW*, 1913 (48(1234):viii). The Exhibition Flying Homer (fig. 5.24) and Genuine Exhibition Flying Homer (fig. 5.25) shown in the diagram were, the letter explained, contentious modern creations, designed to “combine the useful with the ornamental” (*FW*, 1913 (48(1234):viii). At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, the Exhibition Flying Homer (EFH) – also referred to as an Exhibition Working Homer – was developed as a breed half-way between the

Show Homer and the racing bird (fig. 5.24). In 1902, the Exhibition Flying Homer Society was formed, publishing a standard that stressed the importance of a “nice straight-faced bird, with nothing of the character and sweep of head of the Show Homer” (FW, 1903 (28(717):630)). Fanciers of the two breeds sought to distinguish them, Show Homer fanciers seeing ‘beauty’ in a large body and rounded head, whilst EFH fanciers saw ‘beauty’ in slimmer, more athletic-looking birds.



Figure 5.24: *The Exhibition Flying Homer Club's Standard*, 1925

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1925 (72(1874):778)



Figure 5.25: *A Genuine Flying Homer*, 1933

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1933 (88 (2287):680)

A lot of fanciers agreed that the Homer bred for the show pen had become “merely a nondescript mongrel” variously called “an exhibition, genuine, etc., etc. *ad infinitum*” (*FW*, 1909 (40(1026):396)), criticising the “clumsy, complicated, and now meaningless names” given to these Homer varieties (*FW*, 1913 (48(1234):viii)). Pigeon *racers* also objected to these breeds, arguing that the fancy breeds be “stripped” of names such as ‘working’, ‘flying’, and ‘homer’, seeking to protect the integrity of their *real* fliers (see Chapter 7) (*FW*, 1903 (28(712):346)). Thus, whilst fanciers relished in the unbounded potential of fancy pigeon breeding, for some there was a ‘limit’ to how far breeding for fancy points should be taken.

5.4 (Re)Making Fancy Pigeons: ‘Faking’

With the fabled ‘ideal’ so far from attainment, the constant drive for ‘perfection’ and ‘beauty’, and the increasingly competitive nature of pigeon exhibitions, the *moral* limits of fanciers’ practices were also stretched by what was termed ‘faking’. This contentious practice involved the physical alteration of birds’ appearances by hand, attaining an artificial state of ‘perfection’, rather than one achieved through calculated breeding. Unlike Ingold’s (2000:22) “veil” that can be lifted through showing, this aspect of pigeon fancying was concealed or masked at shows, a controversial ‘backstage’ (Goffman, 1959) practice. In 1897, the NPS President stated that faking constituted “dishonourable practices that unfortunately to some extent blot the Fancy” (*FW*, 1897 (16(406):591)). The majority of fanciers condemned faking as both unfair and cruel. Nonetheless, at the end of the nineteenth century, Ure (1886) estimated that about one in twenty-five fancy pigeons were shown in an altered state, many believing faking to be a “growing evil” (*FW*, 1895 (12(290):64)). Others, however, including Mr Harrison Weir, suggested that birds were “shown less trimmed than they used to be” (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):517)). Some early pigeon fancying books, in fact, documented frequent ‘artificial improvement’ as early as the eighteenth century (Moore, 1735; Girton, 1775).

The Pigeon Club’s Rule III defined faking as: “any operation performed on a bird for the sake of profit or honour, that is not necessary for its health or comfort” (*FW*, 1896 (14(349):329)). The Club – and later the National Pigeon Association – with the aim of safeguarding both fair-play and pigeon welfare, had the power to

disqualify, ban, and fine guilty fanciers. Fanciers could appeal to the Pigeon Club if they suspected a bird had been faked, or if their bird had been wrongly disqualified for alleged faking, an appointed committee examining the birds.

Faking involved a constellation of practices, each with varying levels of deviance and danger, including trimming feathers, wattles, beaks, and eye ceres, as well as adding, removing or dying feathers. Some fanciers, Ure (1886) stated, inserted cork into birds' beak wattles, in order to give them a fuller appearance, whilst some Fantails, Lyell (1887:173) explained, had pasteboard, wire frames, or lead weights fixed to their tails, to manipulate their growth. Thus, by whatever means, pigeon exhibitors in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries engaged in the (re)production of the 'perfect' pigeon. Again, such practices echo the contentious use of avian ornamentation in the fashion industry at this time – known as the 'plume boom' (Pacault and Patchett, 2016) – which also raised serious ethical concerns over animal welfare and rights.

There were two main objections to 'faking', the first based on 'truth' and linked to fair-play. Many fanciers were concerned that artificially altered birds were not true to their 'natural' states and, therefore, were not 'beautiful'. Indeed, Mrs Comyns-Lewer defined faking as: "the exhibition of any specimen in other than its natural condition" (*FW*, 1896 (14(348):292)). This echoed the beliefs of John Ruskin (1846:24), who argued that "nothing can be beautiful which is not true". In debates about faked Baldhead Tumblers, for instance, fanciers questioned 'unnatural' markings. The breed, Fulton (1880:180) wrote, required a "sharp, clean-cut marking", the top half of its head a different colour. However, artist and fancier Mr Ludlow claimed that such markings were "a line of demarcation opposed to nature...[which] encourages the art of the unscrupulous trimmer...a temptation...too often 'improved' upon" (fig. 5.26), fanciers using scissors to trim the feathers into an unnaturally straight line (*FW*, 1908 (39(1007):528)).



Figure 5.26: "An unnatural line", 1908

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1908 (39(1007):528)

Whilst breeding was an 'art' in which birds were 'moulded', most fanciers condemned the skilful manipulations involved in faking as "trickery" (Fulton, 1880:245) or "frauds" (Lyell, 1887:173), masking imperfections and creating an illusion. This was, many argued, unfair, one exhibitor complaining that "the honest breeder" had little chance "against those who are apt in the use of scissors" (*FW*, 1898 (19(485):430)). Fanciers regularly referred to faked birds as 'made' birds, one stating that birds were "worked" until they became "presentable" (*FW*, 1893 (9(220):234)), whilst another described the process as "cut and carve", hinting at both the malleability of pigeons' bodies and the skill involved (*FW*, 1895 (13(323):209)). Mr Ludlow, in fact, described faked Frillback pigeons as "nature and art combined", claiming that the breed's curls were often "suspected of being *ironed* up to idealistic perfection" (*FW*, 1909 (41(1047):xii)). These concerns were, interestingly, echoed by an advert in *The Feathered World* in 1910 for medication to 'cure' human obesity: condemning the use of corsets for giving ladies a 'false' appearance, it stated that female figures were "sometimes not real, but the creation of the dressmaker's art" (*FW*, 1910 (43(1113):625)).

Pigeon fanciers' second objection to 'faking' was about pigeon welfare, the practice criticised as "cruel" and "abominable" (*FW*, 1895 (12(290):63)), "barbarity" and "inhumanity" (*FW*, 1895 (12(299):328)). At the 1891 Dairy Show, for instance, the Pigeon Club reported:

"stitches of silk thread had been passed through the heads of two of the Owl pigeons...between the eyes...Eight pigeons, including these two, had

had a silk thread through the gullet and jewing [wattle growth at the base of the beak]...tied together" (FW, 1891 (5(126):411)).

Both Mr Mathias of the Pigeon Club and representatives from the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) provided evidence in court, agreeing that "the operation to which the pigeons had been subjected must have caused them suffering", and the defendant was fined £5 (FW, 1891 (5(126):411)). Thus, almost like human cosmetic surgery, fanciers performed 'operations' on their birds to alter their appearances. Reports of similar instances appeared in *The Feathered World* from time to time, the Pigeon Club working with scientists, vets, the RSPCA, and specialist breed societies in order to assess the cases.

5.4.1 'Making Faces'

Fulton's (1880) *Book of Pigeons*, one fancier wrote, "mercilessly exposed" the cruel and fraudulent practices of Short-faced Tumbler fanciers, referred to as "the making of the head" (FW, 1895 (12(290):63)). The Short-faced Tumbler came in an assortment of colours and markings, including the aforementioned highly-valued Almond Tumbler. Short-faced Tumbler standards, in the second half of the nineteenth century prioritised the head and beak, Fulton (1880:159) explained, these features becoming 'commodities' with "extraordinary...commercial value". As a result, Fulton (1880:157) wrote, "nearly all skilled fanciers" of Short-faced Tumblers resorted to some form of faking in order to emphasise these features, 'imperfect' birds made to *appear* 'perfect'. The most common practice, he explained, was to straighten the beak and alter the forehead a little each day, when the birds were only six-days old:

"press[ing] back the front of the head, at the base, with the thumb-nail...to make what is called a good stop; the skull being thus forced inwards, growing wider and higher" (Fulton, 1880:157).

Some fanciers, Fulton (1880:157) claimed, had developed "an instrument of wood" for this purpose, which, when pushed against the base of the forehead from about ten-days old, made the beak straight and the skull "wider, higher, and better in shape". He condemned this practice as "cruel and barbarous" (Fulton, 1880:158) and, as a result, the illustration of this "implement of torture" (fig.

5.27) was subsequently omitted from the second edition of his book, due to the “sense of horror” it had created (Fulton, 1895:177).



Figure 5.27: The wooden instrument used to ‘make’ Short-faced Tumblers, 1880

Source: Fulton (1880:157)

Fulton (1895:179) termed such practices “the evils of tampering with the skull” and warned of the dangers to birds’ health from a very young age:

“the beak being bent upwards, while the base of the skull is crushed inwards, the passage of the nostrils is partially closed...almost entirely so. This interferes...very seriously with the breathing...the poor sufferer is often seen panting, with the wings hanging loose, as if in the last stage of consumption” (Fulton, 1880:158).

This shortened the birds’ lives and caused illnesses such as canker, lung disease, and eye infections. As well as these manipulations of the birds’ bone structures, Short-faced Tumbler fanciers also performed other, less controversial alterations. Trimming beaks, Fulton (1880:179) claimed, caused “no more pain than trimming the nails” and was “absolutely requisite in a great many birds” with overhanging upper mandibles. However, he explained, some fanciers cut the birds’ beaks too short “so much that blood has dropped from the point of the beak whilst in the pen!...Such barbarity” (Fulton, 1880:179). In 1880, Fulton believed that at least three quarters of Short-faced Tumblers at shows had been ‘doctored’, later calling these practices “the greatest blot that has tarnished” the pastime (Fulton, 1895:178). As a result, fanciers reflected, faking had “brought such discredit on the S.F. Tumbler Fancy generally as to cause many honest breeders to give it up” (*FW*, 1895 (12(290):63)). Indeed, an *Aids to Amateurs* card (1908, No.10) – which, incidentally, *neglected* the topic of ‘faking’ – stated that Short-faced Tumblers, including the once-popular Almond, had “lost ground” during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

5.4.2 Show Preparation: Drawing the Line

An editorial in *The Feathered World* stated: “sooner or later, the honest exhibitor is brought face to face with the question as to how far it is legitimate for him to call art in to assist nature” (*FW*, 1895 (13(323):209)). It continued: “that preparation of some kind is necessary, most people will allow; but where the line is to be drawn between honest conduct and the reverse...is a very moot point” (*FW*, 1895 (13(323):209)). Indeed, most fanciers agreed that birds had to be ‘prepared’ before being sent to shows, undergoing “skilfully performed...little touches” to add to their ‘beauty’ (*FW*, 1914 (50(1286):315)). One Fantail exhibitor explained: “a lady’s hair would not look so beautiful if never attended to, and a city merchant would be a sorry object if he never brushed or combed his thatch” (*FW*, 1931 (85(2205):396)). As a result, birds could not be “picked up from the loft floor, put into a basket and sent to a show with any chance of winning”, without being ‘prepared’ (*FW*, 1931 (84(2192):1012)).

Beak wattles and eye ceres were regularly ‘prepared’, House (1920:126) recommending a sponge and toothbrush be used to clean “in all its crevices”. Other fanciers lightly dusted wattles and ceres with Violet powder or Pear’s Prepared Fullers Earth, almost like make-up. This, House (1920:126) suggested, “will catch the eye of the careful judge much before one that is dirty and greasy”. Such preparation, he argued got the pigeons “up to concert pitch”, a condition which, he recognised, was only a very temporary state of perfection (House, 1920:131). Different breeds required different preparation for shows, Ure (1886:4) suggesting that “a few feathers removed from the legs of a Pouter” constituted “permissible trimming”, but, if applied to breeds where points were awarded for feathering and marking, he added, it became “fraud”. Thus, definitions of ‘preparation’ and ‘faking’ were ambiguous and breed-specific, there being a fine line between legitimate and controversial acts.

For some fanciers, the difference between preparation and faking was cruelty. This was Ure’s (1886:84) interpretation of the rule, arguing that the line should be drawn at practices which could “inflict great agony on the poor birds”. Nonetheless, it was aesthetic considerations that seemed to dominate definitions of faking. As mentioned, Reverend Lumley’s public disagreement with the Pigeon Club’s rules on faking led to his expulsion from the Club in 1897. The Reverend Lumley controversially recommended “the removal of one or two foul or

deformed feathers”, despite the Club’s rules stating that “no feathers should be *plucked*” (*FW*, 1897 (17(435):439)). Lumley, argued that the removal of a few feathers was preferable to “the man who alters the *whole plumage*” by oiling, dyeing, or powdering (*FW*, 1897 (17(435):439)). Almond Tumbler fanciers, for instance, reportedly dyed feathers and gave them “a touch-up with oil”, amplifying their natural colouring (Fulton, 1880:179). Lumley also deemed washing as faking, claiming that it gave birds “an *unnatural* gloss and tint” (*FW*, 1897 (17(435):439)). Washing was, however, widely practised and advocated for hygiene purposes. Fanciers used soap, whitening agents, glycerine, borax, honey, indigo, and products advertised as ‘feather beautifiers’ to clean and brighten feathers several days before a show, allowing “the powdery bloom to form again” before being judged (*FW*, 1897 (17(433):396)). Cleanliness was regularly emphasised by pigeon fanciers. At a time when industrial smog, overcrowding, and lack of running water or sewerage accounted for unsanitary (human) living conditions, the Victorian working classes made an “enormous effort”, Himmelfarb (2006:16) explains, “to be clean as well as to be seen to be clean”. Fanciers’ high standards of cleanliness for their birds – in the loft, in transit, and at shows – therefore reflected growing societal concerns in the late-nineteenth century about health and hygiene.

In the 1920s and 1930s, fanciers writing to *The Feathered World*, it appears, felt uneasy that the distinction between preparation and faking had “never been definitely agreed upon” and that the National Pigeon Association had “made no ruling” on the matter (*FW*, 1931 (84(2192):1012)). A regular correspondent for the paper in 1933 stated that there was “very little faking these days”, although his advice for ‘preparation’ would have certainly clashed with the old Pigeon Club’s rules: “do not try to look terribly honest and leave a coloured feather staring at you”, he recommended (*FW*, 1931 (85(2206):433)). The definition of ‘faking’ was, therefore, uncertain, some practices appearing “mere venial forms” in comparison to others, but all of which redefined and transformed the topographies of fancy pigeons (*FW*, 1897 (16(406):592)).

5.5 Picturing ‘Perfect’ Pigeons

Whilst fancy pigeons were seen as figurative works of ‘art’, masterpieces imagined, created, and altered, the finest birds – and, indeed, the imagined

'ideals' – were also depicted in artistic forms. The very visual nature of the exhibition of pigeon aesthetics was, therefore, further emphasised by their display in a range of visual media, including pen-and-ink sketches, water-colour paintings, oil paintings, and photographs. Pigeon portraits were reproduced as instructional aids, explanatory guides, and status-boosting accessories in *The Feathered World*, books, and as collectors' cards and prints. This paralleled flourishing late-Georgian and Victorian animal portraiture, in which great pride was taken in displaying the visual aesthetics of livestock and domestic pets as symbols of human ingenuity and identity. By the early-twentieth century, developments in photography techniques gave further momentum to Edwardian representation of animal aesthetics, fancy pigeons included in the non-human subjects captured on film.

For pigeon fanciers, there was a strong link between seeing and knowing, the majority agreeing that images were better than "sometimes very misleading" verbal descriptions (*FW*, 1896 (14(345):195)). Pigeons "must be *seen* to be properly understood", one fancier explained (*FW*, 1905 (32(824):748)). Knowledge of fancy pigeon aesthetics was, then, simultaneously displayed and produced by their exhibition and representation. Each representation, be it fanciers' own sketches and photographs or commissioned professional portraits, created a 'way of seeing' fancy pigeons, contributing to the imaginative construction of breed identities. Portraits of real-life birds celebrated fanciers' ingenuity in breeding, whilst portraits of 'ideal' birds made the 'impossible' appear achievable. Debates about visual representation of fancy pigeons, then, focussed on precision, accuracy, and 'truth'.

5.5.1 Pigeon Artists

Letters to *The Feathered World* were unanimous in emphasising that faithful representations of fancy pigeons could only be drawn or painted by experienced pigeon fanciers with an intimate knowledge of pigeon aesthetics, non-fanciers criticised for painting exaggerated caricatures. Ure (1886:vii) explained: "a pigeon artist is the better of being a good judge and keen fancier". Pigeon artists, fanciers believed, needed a special skill and a particular eye for detail, one regular contributor to the paper explaining: "an artist can see both good and defective points in a bird at a glance, while we poor ordinary mortals might gaze

on the same object for a lifetime without discovering the very point he sees in a second" (*FW*, 1895 (13(334):522)). The subjects of artists' paintings and sketches were either imaginary 'ideals' or real-life winning show birds. Fanciers regularly celebrated the work of pigeon artists, which, one claimed, could "educate and advance our hobby by training the eye to correct ideals" (*FW*, 1910 (43(1098):i)). Pigeon portraiture was, therefore, instructional, (re)defining fancy pigeons.

Fanciers sometimes exhibited portraits of their prized pigeons – either painted by themselves or by an artist – at club meetings and shows. The United Show Homer Club (USHC), for instance, from its inception in 1888, held "a show of drawings...in conjunction with the annual show", although it was reportedly not as popular as was hoped (*FW*, 1910 (43(1098):i)). At the 1909 USHC Camberwell Show, first prize was awarded to a painting of a dun chequer hen by a Mr Leslie (fig. 5.28). "So true it is to the living bird", one fancier wrote, "that one feels tempted to lift it out of the pen for closer examination: such softness of outline! Such quality of feather production! Such naturalness of pose!" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1150):x)). Thus, paintings of specific birds were judged according to their likeness to the real-life specimen, and whether they seemed 'real'.



Figure 5.28: "Dun Chequer Show Homer Hen" by Mr Leslie, 1909

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1911 (45(1150):x)

Whilst many fanciers sent in their own sketches to accompany letters, there were three main artists who contributed the 'official' illustrations to *The Feathered World*: Mr J.W. Ludlow, Mr A.F. Lydon, and Mr A.J. Simpson. In the paper's 1000th issue, Mrs Comyns-Lewer stated that their work was "now legion", having been

used for more than 120 coloured plates (*FW*, 1908 (39(1000):235)). In addition, paintings by animal painter Dean Wolstenholme and the Pigeon Club's Mr Harrison Weir also occasionally featured in the paper. Each of these five artists were, themselves, well-respected amongst the Fancy, their art works also appearing in books and admired as both educational tools and artistic representations.

Mr Ludlow (fig. 5.29), described by one fancier as “the doyen of the craft”, was a member of *The Feathered World's* editorial team and one of the main artistic contributors to the paper. He was also an experienced pigeon and poultry fancier and judge, and a member of Birmingham Columbarium Society, acting as President in 1874. Ludlow reportedly started his artistic career as an apprentice at a Birmingham firm of lithographers. “His training and experience as an engraver”, his obituary wrote, “gave him the required technical skill, and his thorough knowledge of all breeds of poultry and pigeons enabled him to execute his...work with a fidelity and accuracy in detail which secured for him a reputation” (*FW*, 1916 (54(1403):707)). Ludlow produced paintings and sketches of imagined ‘ideal’ pigeons for both editions of Fulton’s (1880; 1895) *Book of Pigeons* (fig. 5.30), as well as paintings of his favoured ‘frilled’ varieties for the later *Aids to Amateurs* cards (fig. 5.31). Some of Ludlow’s ‘ideals’ were also circulated to the wider public, used to illustrate the Cope Bros.’ (1926) *Pigeons* cigarette card series (fig. 5.32). He was, however, also regularly commissioned by fanciers to draw or paint “champion and other birds prominent in their respective breeds”, which often appeared as front covers on *The Feathered World* (fig. 5.33) (*FW*, 1916 (54(1403):707)).



Figure 5.29: “Mr J.W. Ludlow”

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1910 (43(1098):ii)



Figure 5.30: "Brunette, Satinette, Bluet, and Silverette" by Ludlow, 1880 (left); "The Frill Back" by Ludlow, 1895 (right)

Sources: Fulton (1880:plate); Fulton (1895:483)



Figure 5.31: Ludlow's paintings used on 'Aids to Amateurs' cards, 1914

Source: *Aids to Amateurs*, 1914 (No.36 and 39)



Figure 5.32: Ludlow's paintings used on Cope Bros.' cigarette cards, 1926

Source: Cope Bros.' (1926) *Pigeons*, No.2 Trumpeter, No.5 Barb, No.14 Saddle Tumbler, No.20 Archangel



Figure 5.33: A Barb by Ludlow on the cover of 'The Feathered World', 1890

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1890 (2(29):cover)

Ludlow was reportedly renowned for his “artistic rendering of his subjects” (*FW*, 1898 (18(461):745)) and praised for “possessing a true eye for form, proportion and symmetry”, details “faithfully and daintily reproduced” (*FW*, 1905 (33(837):5)) and “true to nature” (*FW*, 1905 (33(837):6)). Many believed, in fact, that the popularity of *The Feathered World* had been down to the frontispieces drawn and painted by Ludlow. On June 29th 1905, members of the Midland Columbarian Society, the Pigeon Club, and other pigeon and poultry societies held the ‘Ludlow Testimonial Dinner’ at the White Horse Hotel in Birmingham, to commemorate him as a “distinguished fancier...the foremost delineator of poultry and pigeons”, a presentation of £128 11s. 6d. – raised by more than 300

fanciers – being made to him (*FW*, 1905 (33(837):5)). Ludlow was described as an “authority”, fanciers believing that he had “had more to do with ideals than any living man” (*FW*, 1905 (33(837):5; 6)). Thus, Ludlow’s portraits of mythical ‘ideals’ and real-life champions both reinforced and redefined fanciers’ knowledge of pigeons.

Another artist closely associated with – and on the editorial board of – *The Feathered World* was Mr Alexander Francis Lydon (fig. 5.34). Lydon was a watercolourist and illustrator with an interest in natural history and landscapes, and produced illustrations for a range of magazines – including *Poultry*, *The Fanciers’ Gazette*, and *Live Stock Journal* – as well as books – such as Rev. William Houghton’s (1879) *British Fresh-Water Fishes*, R. Bowdler Sharpe’s (1898) *Sketch-book of British Birds*, and Mrs Comyns-Lewer and Mr Lewer’s (1912) *Poultry Keeping*. Himself a pigeon fancier, Lydon produced covers for *The Feathered World* (fig. 5.35) and around half of the supplementary ‘ideal’ illustrations in Fulton’s (1895) second edition of *The Book of Pigeons* (fig. 5.36). Some of his pigeons were also used to illustrate the F & J Smith (1908) *Fowls, Pigeons and Dogs* series of cigarette cards, (fig. 5.37) thus reaching the wider public.

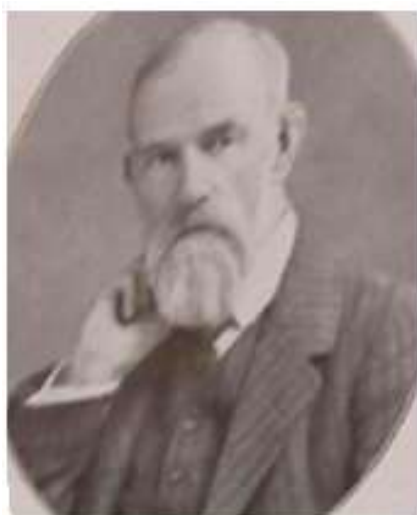


Figure 5.34: “Mr A.F. Lydon”

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1910 (43(1098):ii)



Figure 5.35: *An Archangel* by Lydon on the cover of 'The Feathered World', 1890

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1890 (3(62):cover)



Figure 5.36: *Blue and Red Pied Pigmy Pouters and a Yellow Pied Pouter* by Lydon, 1895

Source: Fulton (1895:plate)



Figure 5.37: Lydon's paintings used on F & J Smith cigarette cards (1908)

Source: F & J Smith (1908) *Fowls, Pigeons and Dogs*, No.17 Dragoon; No.28 Long-Faced Tumbler; No.31 Carrier

It was Lydon who was responsible for designing the first header for *The Feathered World's* covers, which he later modified in 1891 (fig. 5.38). He reportedly contributed more than a thousand drawings to the paper, becoming the most common illustrator featured on the paper's covers until the early-twentieth century.



Figure 5.38: 'The Feathered World's' first cover header (top) and 1891 revised header (bottom) by Lydon

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1889 (1(1):cover); 1891 (5(109):cover)

In 1911, the paper's header was re-designed again (fig. 5.39), this time by Mr Simpson (fig. 5.40), and was used until the 1920s, when the paper became increasingly focused on commercial poultry farming, and the elaborately illustrated header was withdrawn entirely.



Figure 5.39: 'The Feathered World's' cover heading by Simpson, 1911

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (48(1250):cover)



Figure 5.40: "Mr A.J. Simpson"

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1910 (43(1098):ii)

Simpson – whose paintings also reportedly included wild birds, poultry, and rabbits – contributed plates and covers to *The Feathered World* (fig. 5.41). His paintings were also used for the paper's *Aids to Amateurs* (1908-1914) collectors' cards (fig. 5.42), which depicted 'ideal' specimens for each breed, rather than real-life individuals. Whilst still in their first year of publication, Mrs Comyns-Lewer stated that these cards had achieved "remarkable success", the cards – and the water-colour prints made of them – playing vital roles in popularising pigeon and poultry fancying (*FW*, 1908 (39(1000):235)). Mr Simpson's drawings were, therefore, also important in (re)defining and constructing knowledge about pigeon aesthetics.

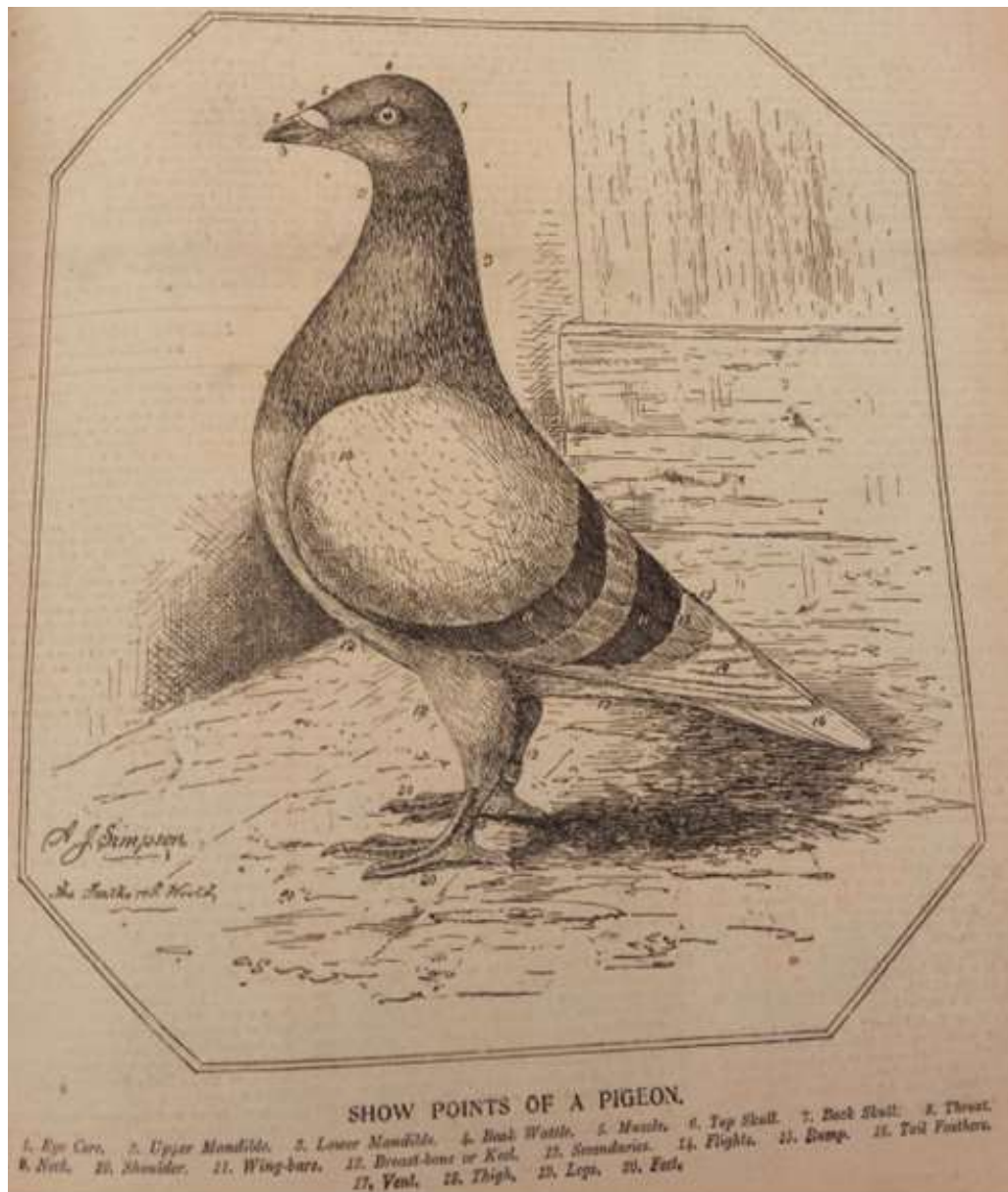


Figure 5.41: Simpson's "Show Points of a Pigeon", used as a cover of 'The Feathered World', 1909
 Source: *The Feathered World*, 1909 (40(120):41)



Figure 5.42: A selection of Simpson's 'Aids to Amateurs' cards

Sources: [Top, left to right] *Aids to Amateurs*, Dragoon (1908, No.5); Show Homer (1908, No.6); Pouter and Pigmy Pouter (1908, No.7); [Bottom, left to right] Jacobin (1908, No.11); Carrier (1909, No.16); Exhibition Homer (1910, No.19)

There were two other artists who, according to former NPS President (1893) Mr Hewitt, were “the most successful delineators of pigeons”: (Charles) Dean Wolstenholme the younger and Mr Harrison Weir (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)). Their pigeon portraits – often by commission – were collected and traded by fanciers, used as illustration in books, and reproduced in *The Feathered World*.

Wolstenholme's (1798-1883) entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* describes him as a sporting painter and engraver, who specialised in hunting and shooting scenes, his work displayed at the Royal Academy, the Royal Society of British Arts, and the British Museum (Lane, 2004[online]). He had a similar style and passion for hunting scenes as his father, Dean Wolstenholme Senior (1757-1837), but it was his love of Bulldogs and Almond Tumbler pigeons that led Wolstenholme Junior to paint fancy animals (Paget, 1946a; Paget, 1946b; Lane, 2004[online]). He was reportedly an “honoured name” on the register of

the prestigious City Columbarian Society (*FW*, 1907 (36(926):548)), his skill in breeding Almond Tumblers acknowledged in 1869 by the presentation of a testimonial to him by fanciers (Paget, 1946b; Lane, 2004[online]). His skill in painting was also admired. In 1868, one of Wolstenholme's oil paintings of the Almond Tumbler (fig. 5.43) was presented to the City Columbarian Society and became "one of the club's most cherished possessions" (*FW*, 1907 (36(926):548)). A later Wolstenholme painting of his favoured breed (fig. 5.43), commissioned by author Lyell, was described as "the finest oil painting of an almond to date" by former NPS President Mr Hewitt upon purchasing it – for an undisclosed fee – for his collection (*FW*, 1914 (50(1287):xvi)).

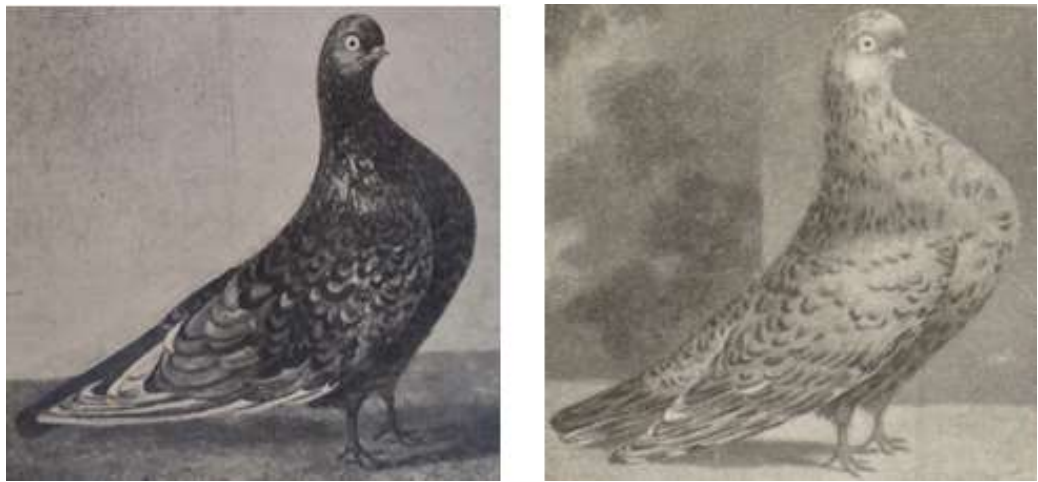


Figure 5.43: "The Almond Tumbler by Wolstenholme" presented to the City Columbarian Society, 1868 (left); "The Almond Tumbler in 1875" by Wolstenholme for Mr Lyell (right)

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1907 (36(926):548); 1914 (50(1287):xvi)

Wolstenholme also provided 'life-sized' illustrations for Eaton's (1851) *Treatise* on the Almond Tumbler, including the front cover (fig. 5.44), a portrait taken "from life in the possession of the author". Fulton (1895:12) argued that this was "the best representation of a pigeon which had yet appeared".



Figure 5.44: “A portrait from life in the possession of the author”: Wolstenholme’s Almond Tumbler used as the frontispiece for Eaton’s (1851) ‘Treatise’

Source: Eaton (1851:cover)

Dean Wolstenholme was reportedly a close friend of the Pigeon Club’s first President Mr Harrison Weir (1824-1906), who, one fancier wrote, “played varied parts of artist, fancier, author, naturalist, judge, and journalist” (FW, 1897 (16(404):525)). Like Wolstenholme, Harrison Weir was an acclaimed artist, whose paintings had been exhibited at the Royal Institution, Royal Academy, and other London venues: “few contemporary artists...[were] more prolific or more popular” (Ingpen, 2004[online]). Harrison Weir’s *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry explains that, as a teenager, he began work in the printing and publishing industry, learning engraving skills and how to use woodblocks (Ingpen, 2004[online]). When the *Illustrated London News* was founded in 1842, Harrison Weir joined their printing team and worked as the draughtsman on the block and engraver of the first issue (Ingpen, 2004[online]).

His main work was, however, in illustrating books and periodicals, seeking to “improve the quality of books for children and for those intended for less affluent members of society” (Ingpen, 2004[online]). His work appeared in periodicals such as *The British Workman* – a monthly broadsheet published 1852-1892 – and *Chatterbox* – a weekly children’s’ magazine published 1866-1953 – as well as books such as Reverend J.G. Wood’s (1891) *Illustrated Natural History*, reportedly doing “much to inculcate love and awaken interest in the birds and beasts” (FW, 1897 (16(404):525)). He also illustrated his own books, including *Memoirs of Bob*

the Spotted Terrier (1885) – a children’s novel – and *Our Cats and All About Them* (1889) – a guide to breeding and exhibiting his main fancy, cats. Members of the Fancy admired his portraits of pigeons, the Pigeon Club committee believing that his work “had done much to make fanciers” (*FW*, 1896 (15(383):475)). A friend of William Tegetmeier, Harrison Weir illustrated Tegetmeier’s (1868) *Pigeons* (fig. 5.45), and later provided the inside cover illustration for Lucas’ (1886) *The Pleasures of the Pigeon Fancier* (fig. 5.46).



Figure 5.45: “Blue Pouter” by Harrison Weir used in Tegetmeier’s (1868) ‘*Pigeons*’

Source: Tegetmeier (1868:inside cover)



Figure 5.46: “The Almond Tumbler” by Harrison Weir in Lucas’ (1886) ‘*The Pleasures of the Pigeon Fancier*’

Sources: Lucas (1886:inside cover)

5.5.2 Framing Pigeons

Each artist in the examples above had their own artistic style and preferred techniques for depicting feathering and markings (fig. 5.47). They all, however, portrayed birds – whether commissioned or imagined – in an upright, alert pose, as they would have appeared in the show pen for judging. Almost all were depicted side-on, an approach also used in late Georgian and Victorian livestock portraiture to emphasise the impressive stature and functional features of farm animals (Ritvo, 1987). Thus, professional sketches and paintings of pigeons aimed to portray the birds in a ‘pose’ that best showed off or modelled their aesthetic qualities. Pouters and Croppers, for instance, were depicted with their crops fully-inflated and stood on a block, as they would in the show pen, to keep their tail from trailing (fig. 5.48). However, unlike livestock portraiture, pigeons were painted *on their own* rather than with their fancier, the links to human ingenuity much more subtle.

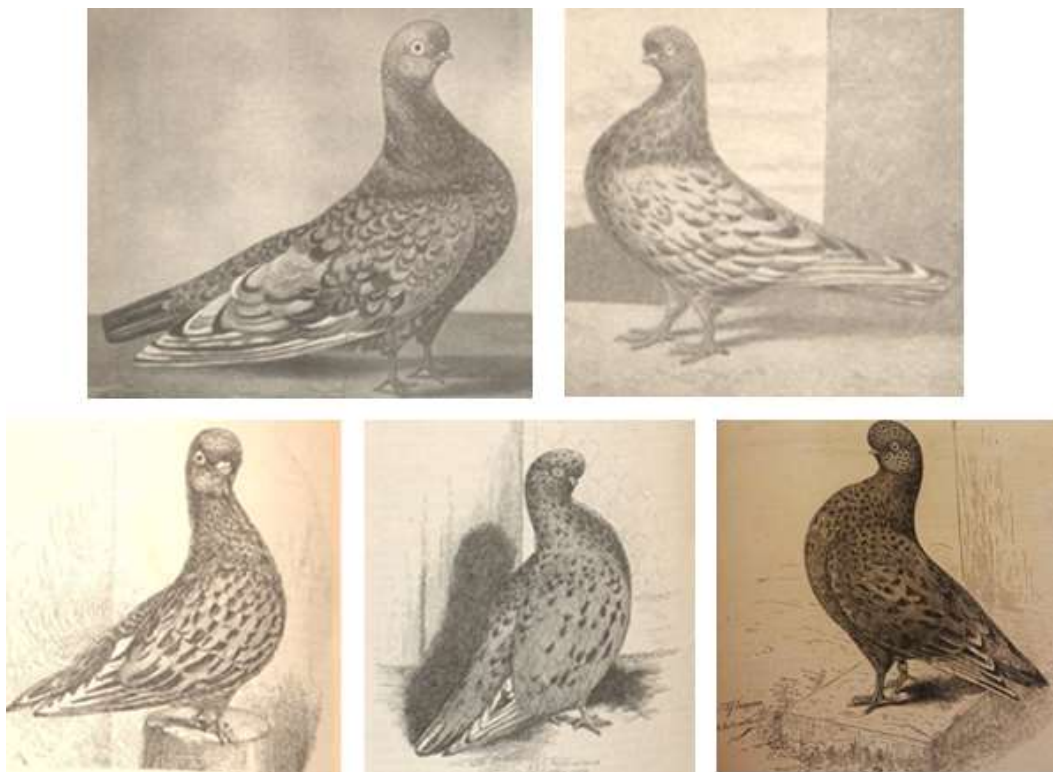


Figure 5.47: Artists' impressions of the Almond Tumbler: "Wolstenholme's portrait of an Almond Tumbler in 1934" (top left); "Harrison Weir's Almond Tumbler" from Tegetmeier's (1868) 'Pigeons' (top right); "Mr. Chapman's Almond Tumbler Hen, 1884" by Ludlow (bottom left); "Almond Tumbler, 1904" by Lydon (bottom centre); An Almond Tumbler by Simpson on the cover of 'The Feathered World', 1908 (bottom right)

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1914 (50(1287):xv); (50(1287):xvi); (50(1287):xvi); (50(1287):xvi); 1908 (38(974):cover)



Figure 5.48: A Pouter stood on a block by Ludlow, 1880 (left) and a Pigmy Pouter stood on a block by Lydon in 1903 (right)

Sources: Fulton (1880:plate); *The Feathered World*, 1903 (29(748):cover)

The locations or settings in which birds were depicted differed between portraits, but does not appear to have been related to the breed, artist, or date of the image. The majority of pictures depicted birds either in the loft (fig. 5.49), the show pen (fig. 5.50) or outside (fig. 5.51). Pictures set in the loft or the show pen depicted fancy pigeons in their 'natural' habitats, the domestic spaces in which they were accustomed to encounters with fanciers. Birds depicted outside, on the other hand, were painted in *imagined* situations – fancy pigeons rarely given such liberty due to fears of damaging or losing feathers – their backdrops ranging from romantic landscapes to simple – perhaps more representative – scenes. Portraits also varied in their detail, again not related to the artist or date. Some featured multiple birds, particularly to show off different varieties of the breed, whilst others were focused studies of one bird. Some were very minimalistic, with no other recognisable detail, whilst others contained appliances such as nest pans, water bowls, food, and perches or blocks (fig. 5.52). The content of paintings and sketches, to some extent, depended upon the context of where they were published. The colour plates published in Fulton's (1880) *Book of Pigeons*, for instance, and the *Aids to Amateurs* (1908-1914) cards, generally showed more detail than images reproduced in black and white in *The Feathered World*, likely due to the technical and financial complications of reproducing images in detail during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.



Figure 5.49: Pigeons depicted in the loft: “Nuns” by Ludlow, 1880 (left); “My J. Jensen’s Yellow Turbit Cock” by Simpson on the cover of *The Feathered World*, 1908 (right)

Source: Fulton (1880:plate); *The Feathered World*, 1908 (38(982):761)

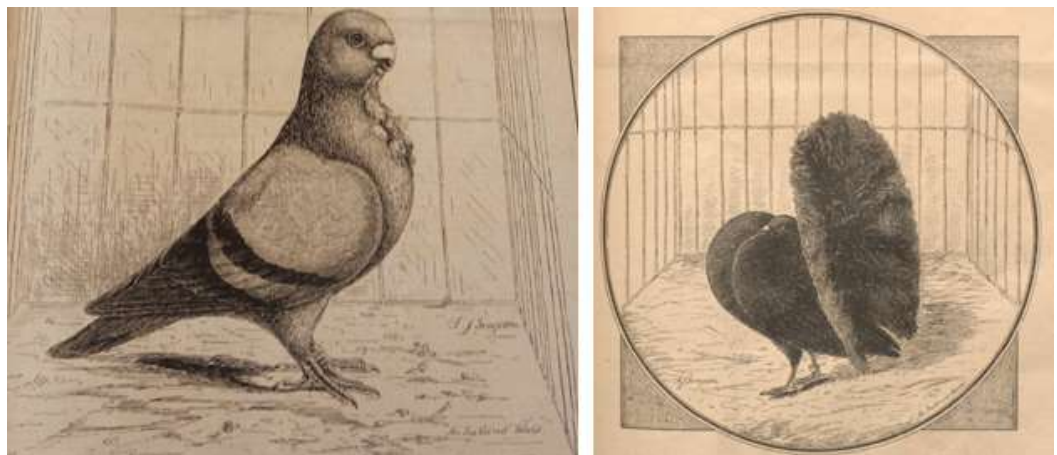


Figure 5.50: Pigeons depicted in the show pen: “A Winning Blue Owl” by Simpson on the cover of *The Feathered World*, 1909 (left); “Best Young Pigeon at the Dairy Show” by Simpson on the cover of *The Feathered World*, 1914 (right)

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1909 (41(1070):1141); 1914 (51(1324):581)



Figure 5.51: Pigeons depicted outside: "Red Pied Pouter Cock" by Ludlow, 1880 (top left); "Black Capuchins and Damascenes" by Ludlow, 1880 (top right); "Light Mottle Tippler" by Simpson, 1908 (bottom left); The Cumulet 'Aids to Amateurs' card by Simpson, 1909 (bottom right)
 Source: Fulton (1880:plate); Fulton (1880 (plate); *The Feathered World*, 1908 (38(991):1101); *Aids to Amateurs*, 1909 (No.13)



Figure 5.52: Pigeons with appliances: “White Carrier Cock” by Ludlow, 1880 (top left); “Short Faced Tumblers” by Ludlow, 1880 (top right); Magpies by Simpson on the cover of ‘*The Feathered World*’, 1913 (bottom left); “Dark Mottle Tippler Hen” by Simpson on the cover of ‘*The Feathered World*’, 1908 (bottom right)

Source: Fulton (1880:plate); Fulton (1880:plate); *The Feathered World*, 1913 (49(1256):69); *The Feathered World*, 1908 (39(993):1)

However, it was neither the setting nor content of pigeon portraiture that pigeon fanciers discussed in *The Feathered World*, but, rather, how accurately portraits depicted the appearance of real-life specimens. Ure (1886:vii), for instance, stated that the birds in his *Our Fancy Pigeons* had been “delineated so carefully and faithfully that those well acquainted with the birds could, if coloured, at once recognize them”. Whilst fanciers criticised individual portraits, taste once again playing a part, there were also more general concerns about whether fancy pigeon aesthetics could be faithfully depicted in artistic form, and whether the reproduction of them in the printed press was close to the original artworks. As has already been revealed, fanciers were unsatisfied with illustrations

accompanying published standards, these artists' 'ideals' not resembling real-life birds. Through pigeon portraiture, fanciers encountered – and learnt about – pigeons past, present, and future. It was, therefore, important to fanciers that depictions were lifelike.

Despite praising the efforts of artists in picturing the 'perfect' pigeon, fanciers' letters often complained that such attempts were not 'truthful' depictions of the birds, one warning: "a bird looks differently on paper" (*FW*, 1913 (48(1229):55)). "Much as we admire...the productions of Messrs. Ludlow, Lydon, Simpson, and others", NPS President Mr Hewitt stated, "and much as the Fancy is indebted to them for their untiring efforts to make known the different varieties...there is something wanting in the result" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)). As one fancier explained, whether consciously or otherwise, artists were "inclined to idealise in a sketch" (*FW*, 1905 (32(815):23)). Mr Cory, a regular contributor to *The Feathered World*, criticised illustrations for "such mathematical accuracy of marking, such severity and sharpness of outline, such highly polished finish and gloss", that a sketch or painting rarely resembled "the living bird it proposes to represent...faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1150):x)). Portraits of pigeons, then, appeared to 'fix' their transient definitions and appearances.

Hewitt argued that "not one in twenty [portraits] bears the slightest individual likeness to the actual specimen", calling paintings and sketches "idealised representation" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)). Commissioned portraits of specific birds, he explained, were "merely an ideal concocted between the artist and the owner" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)). He emphasised that fanciers would not allow artists to "portray their birds' weak points", instead directing them "just to put a little more top skull *here*, just a trifle more beak *there*, a better-shaped wattle or cere, or a little shortening of feather" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)). This echoed the apparent malleability of pigeon aesthetics exposed in fanciers' breeding practices and in the preparation – and 'faking' – of their birds for the show pen.

Debates about the fidelity of artistic representations were paralleled by debates about the technical difficulties of realistically depicting pigeons. In sketching, fanciers and artists were aware of the intricate nature of their subjects, and that the media they used could affect the overall impression. Mr Scatliff explained:

“the very slightest alteration (almost the thickness of a line) may make a considerable difference in the look of a Turbit’s head points” (*FW*, 1905 (32(815):23)). “A pen sketch of a bird’s head looks very much finer than a photo of a bird with the face filled in”, another fancier suggested (*FW*, 1913 (48(1228):8)). Thus, the precision and attention to detail with which fanciers bred and cared for their pigeons was equally necessary in artistically depicting them.

Whilst discussions about specific portraits of successful birds rarely stated whether they had been painted from life or from the fancier’s imagination, debate in general favoured the former. Tegetmeier (1868) emphasised that the birds in his *Pigeons* were drawn from life, suggesting the importance of this to ‘realistic’ representation. However, in drawing birds from life, artists encountered challenges due to birds moving about, patience and skill becoming vital. Reflecting on Mr McNaught’s experience of drawing birds from life for his *Our Fancy Pigeons*, Ure (1886:vii) wrote:

“the fantail proved a far more difficult task...when in a pen [it] remained scarcely two seconds in one position, rendering it almost impossible to catch the fine curves of the neck and breast. In spite, however, of the antics of the bird, the amateur artist has succeeded wonderfully well, though perhaps not quite so thoroughly as with the pouters” (fig. 5.53).

Portraits of these living, moving creatures, then, represented both a fixed ‘ideal’ moment and the possibility and grace of movement.

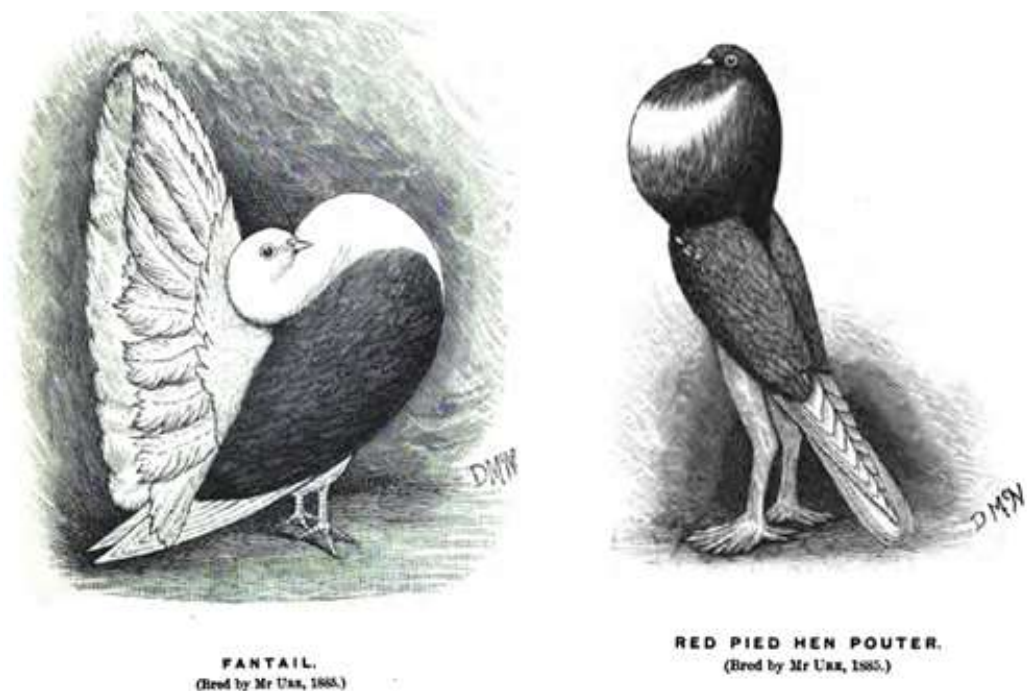


Figure 5.53: The Fantail (left) and the Pouter (right), by McNaught
Sources: Ure (1886:plates)

The process of reproducing artists' sketches and paintings in newspapers and books also posed challenges. Amongst the methods used in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were woodcuts, etching, metal engraving, and lithography (Blunt, 1950; Brown, 2008; Brown, 2014). Wood blocks and line blocks were used in *The Feathered World*, as well as by Tegetmeier (1868), Ure (1886), and Lyell (1887) in their respective books. Mr Lewer, in 1897, however, wrote that illustrations produced in this way "lost considerably in their interpretation under the engraver's tool" (*FW*, 1897 (16(404):525)). By way of example, in 1920, Show Homer fancier Mr Burgess complained that his illustration of a Show Homer head in *The Feathered World* (fig. 5.54) had "been mounted by the engraver slightly askew" (*FW*, 1920 (62(1599):182)). He suggested readers looked at the picture with "the top right corner and bottom left corner of the page as the vertical" (fig. 5.54), as he had intended it, "otherwise it looks altogether too downfaced" (*FW*, 1920 (62(1599):180)).

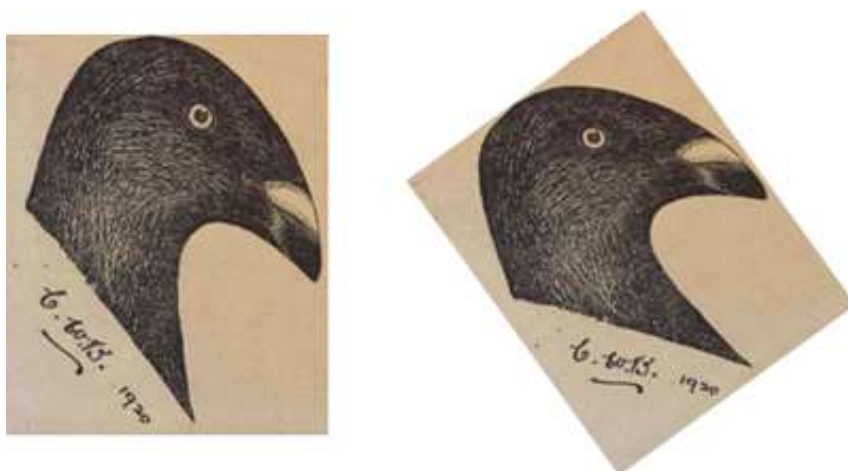


Figure 5.54: Mr Burgess' Show Homer sketch as it appeared in 'The Feathered World' (left) and how he had intended (right)

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1920 (62(1599):151)

A further practical concern mentioned by fanciers was paper quality, which affected what editors could publish. *The Feathered World* used low-quality paper to reduce its price, but consequently editorial notes were often added to the end of letters apologising for being unable to print images that “would not reproduce well” (*FW*, 1903 (28(715):526)) or were “in a medium unsuitable for reproduction” (*FW*, 1903 (28(716):577)). Paper quality also meant that those images that were published could be difficult to see in detail, and sometimes differed in quality between copies. One fancier, for instance, explained how he had misinterpreted a sketch of a bird accompanying a letter in the paper, as his “copy of *F.W.* was a dark one”, changing his opinion having later “seen another copy of a shade lighter colour” (*FW*, 1903 (28(717):629)).

The low quality paper used by *The Feathered World* meant that the majority of its illustrations were in black and white. Mr Hewitt, however, argued that this was not “the most suitable medium by which to portray pigeons, as it is almost impossible to express the texture of feathers by this means” (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)). He recommended, instead, using half-tone blocks, which could reproduce images in greyscale. Developed in the 1880s, the invention of the half-tone process improved the quality of printing, coinciding with the establishment of new newspapers and magazines, such as the *Daily Mail*, *Country Life*, and *Railway Magazine* (Cox and Mowatt, 2014; Brown, 2014), although it appears to have had little impact on *The Feathered World*, Mrs Comyns-Lewer stating that

the half-tone blocks were expensive and required better quality paper. Colour reproductions of sketches and paintings in the paper were, therefore, reserved for the glossy paper of occasional 3s. special issues, or plates inserted into regular issues (fig. 5.55). Such images were described as “exquisite” and “lifelike”, giving “great satisfaction to readers” (*FW*, 1898 (18(461):745)).



Figure 5.55: “Cumulets”: colour plate painted by Ludlow and printed on glossy paper, 1898
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1898 (18(458):plate)

5.5.3 Photographing ‘Beauty’

Photography also came under scrutiny in *The Feathered World*, although in the paper’s early days its use was very limited. Mrs Comyns-Lewer explained that photographs “would not reproduce properly in an ordinary issue” and, therefore, they were reserved for special issues with higher-quality glossy paper (*FW*, 1905 (32(815):230)). Indeed, Brown (2014) explains that photographs had limited impact on publishing in general before the 1880s because, until the invention of the half-tone process, there was no cheap or efficient method for reproducing them for print. Furthermore, by 1900, mass-produced Kodak cameras were transforming photography from a specialised and complicated pursuit to one easily practised by all social classes (Ryan, 1997; Munir and Phillips, 2005). The changing relationship between photography and society meant that the everyday could be spontaneously captured in the ‘snapshot’. Indeed, an advert for Kodak cameras in *The Feathered World* in 1900 (fig. 5.56) advocated their use to “photograph your feathered pets”, framing them as easy to use and affordable (*FW*, 1900 (23(582):224)). In 1930, the paper further encouraged children to

photograph their birds, launching a competition amongst their Young Fanciers' League members (fig. 5.57).



Figure 5.56: An advert for Kodak cameras in 'The Feathered World', 1900
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1900 (23(582):224)



Figure 5.57: Image used to advertise the Young Fanciers' League's photography competition, 1930
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1930 (83(2149):293)

Photographs of birds were published in the paper as illustrative and instructional aids, particularly for those who could not attend shows, and can be categorised into two types. Firstly, professional photographs were taken to commemorate successful individual birds (fig. 5.58). The names of professional photographers responsible for the photographs sent to the paper were not usually published, and the photographs taken by the paper's own photographers were attributed to either 'C. Hosegood', or 'The Feathered World'. Like paintings, professional photographs were taken from the side, the birds appearing as they would do in the show pen. They usually contained only one bird and were minimalistic, set against a plain background, one fancier explaining how photographs were

“spoiled by showing too much surroundings” (*FW*, 1913 (48(1237):455)).

Secondly, fanciers sent in their own amateur photographs of their birds, more informal shots taken of birds in everyday situations in their lofts (fig. 5.59). These often contained multiple birds and sometimes included the fancier, pictured proudly with his birds, illustrating his importance in creating them (fig. 5.60). Unlike the aforementioned sketches and paintings, sold at auction and collected, photographs were not, it seems, treated in the same way. Mrs Comyns-Lewer explained: “I doubt if any photographer would go about taking portraits of birds on the chance of being able to sell them” (*FW*, 1903 (29(735):127)). However, like the exhibitions of pigeon art, pigeon photography was also sometimes exhibited at shows.

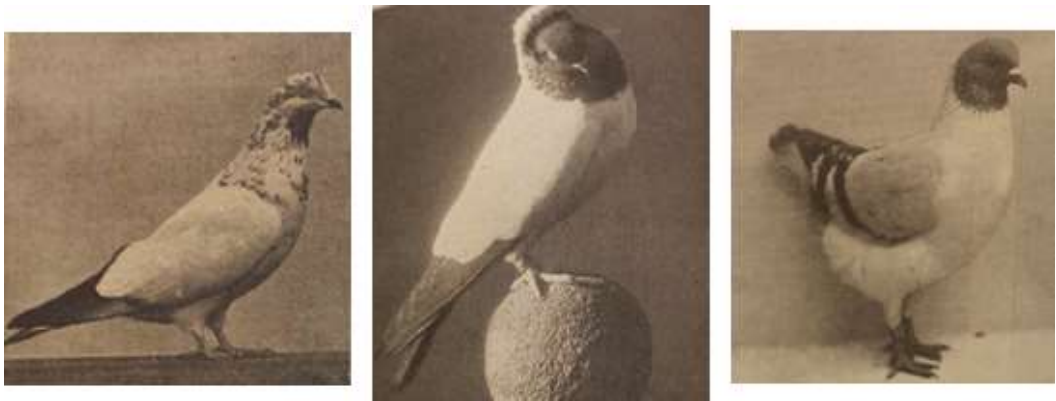


Figure 5.58: “Light Print Flying Tippler Hen”, 1927 (left); “Black Nun Hen”, 1923 (centre); “Blue Gazzi Modena Cock”, 1923 (right)

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1927 (76(1978):772); 1923 (68(1760):x); 1923 (68(1763):578)



Figure 5.59: “Croppers from the Langmere Lofts”, 1925

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1925 (72(1854):12)



Figure 5.60: "A study in Jacobins": photograph of two successful Jacobin fanciers accompanying a feature about the breed, 1930

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1930 (83(2151):365)

There was a lot of skill involved in taking a good photograph of a fancy pigeon. Mr Powell, a regular name in *The Feathered World*, explained the difficulties of getting pigeons to stay still for photographs: "at the critical moment [they] would either fly to the roof of the studio or slip...and come out with one leg, two heads, or no head at all" (*FW*, 1891 (5(129):474)). After experimenting with different settings – he took nineteen attempts, costing 25s. – Powell found that the birds "only remain passive upon a block of wood" (*FW*, 1891 (5(129):474)). He was not alone in bemoaning the difficulty of taking the perfect photograph, Mr Hewitt arguing that it was "very difficult to obtain the right pose and to show the bird off at its best" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)), whilst another fancier stated: "it is but seldom that the bird itself will oblige by adopting just that pose which will display its value and best points" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1150):x)). 'Good' photographs were, therefore, praised in *The Feathered World*. Mrs Comyns-Lewer, in 1913, for instance, complimented two photographs taken by a Mr Robinson (fig. 5.61). "How cleverly the artist has caught characteristic poses", she exclaimed, calling the photographs "as lifelike as the camera can make them" (*FW*, 1913 (48(1234):xiii)). Referring to the photograph of a Norwich Cropper, she explained: "it is no easy task to get a satisfactory likeness of any of the 'blowing' fraternity", since they rarely fully inflated their crop long enough for a photograph to be taken (*FW*, 1913 (48(1234):xiii)).

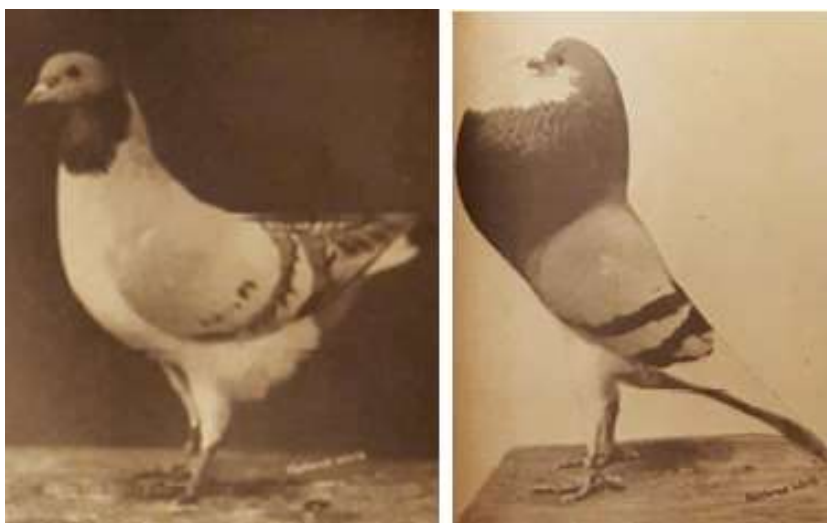


Figure 5.61: "Silver Modena", 1913 (left); "Norwich Cropper Cock, Bred 1912" (right)
Source: *The Feathered World*, 1913 (48(1234):xiii)

Thus, fanciers were aware of the challenge of taking lifelike photographs, and their importance in constructing 'characteristic' breed identities. Mr Cory, a regular contributor to the paper, stated: "to get a respectable life-size picture the camera is so near that the true relative proportions of the parts are not maintained" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1150):x)). Others emphasised that photographs relied very heavily on the quality of lighting and any subsequent shadows. Mr Powell, for instance, struggled "to retain the lovely iridescent colouring shade of the [Magpie's] neck, which...has never yet been equalled on a photograph of a living bird" (*FW*, 1891 (5(129):474)). Due to these difficulties, letters to *The Feathered World* discussed the utility and truthfulness of photographs. Some fanciers saw photographs as faithful representations, Mr Powell believing photographs to be "exact representations...taken from life", favourable to "ideal paintings...of a good 'might be'" (*FW*, 1891 (5(129):475)). A Turbit fancier in 1905 added: "the camera is the only real help we have by which we can hope to give a faithful and satisfactory picture of our pets" (*FW*, 1905 (32(833):1132)). Indeed, the difficulty of depicting detail in sketches and paintings appeared to have been resolved by photography. "As regards texture of feather", Mr Hewitt admitted, photography was "an advance upon pen drawings" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1151):39)).

On the other hand, however, some fanciers argued that "photography rarely conveys the true impression" (*FW*, 1911 (45(1150):x)). Mr Cory bemoaned: "I am

found running a tilt (1) against the impossibly perfect ideal, beloved of artists, and (2) against the vagaries of the camera” (FW, 1911 (45(1150):x)). Like debate in academic literature about the ability of photographs to tell the ‘truth’ (Sontag, 1979; Goldstein, 2007; Rose, 2000; Rose, 2007), some pigeon fanciers were suspicious of the reliability of photographs, although there was no mention of *deliberate* attempts to deceive through photography. Perhaps as a result, photographs were not used to accompany standards, Mr Lovell explaining: “the object of an ideal is to emphasise every point which is desired to make a perfect specimen, hence we must have mathematical accuracy and sharpness of outline” which, he claimed, was achieved in sketches but not in photographs (FW, 1911 (45(1154):139)).

An interesting example of this precision sought by fanciers emerged in 1914, when fanciers wrote to *The Feathered World* debating the beak-setting – the alignment between the beak mandibles and the eye – of Dragoons, a breed described by an F & J Smith cigarette card (1908, No.17) as one of “the greatest favourites”. Mr Fletcher, referred to as the “Dragoon Daddy” (FW, 1914 (50(1284):211)), sent four pictures (fig. 5.62) into *The Feathered World* which started the debate. The first was a photograph of a bird belonging to a Mr Moores; next were two photographs of “heads of noted winners”; and finally, “a study of an adult Dragoon head by Mr. A.J. Simpson”, regarded as a faithful sketch of the Dragoon standard (FW, 1914 (50(1282):99)). Fanciers argued over which of these birds, judging from the pictures supplied, had the ‘correct’ beak-setting and which one most closely resembled the standard.



Figure 5.62: “Beak Setting in Dragoons”, 1914

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1914 (50(1282):99)

It was striking that the appropriateness and reliability of photography was called into question within this debate. One fancier, for instance, criticised the second photograph: “[it] suffers in comparison to No.1, in all probability by not being snapped at the right moment. The least elevation of the beak at the moment the ball was present would have made all the difference to it” (FW, 1914

(50(1284):211)). This suggests that items such as balls may have been used to distract birds and make them 'pose' for photographs, although this was the only reference found to such a technique. Lighting was also discussed, fanciers claiming that shadows created illusions that affected their interpretation of photographs. After three months of discussion in the paper's columns, Mr Fletcher admitted that the second and third photographs were, in fact, the same bird (fig. 5.63). "I only sent them to show that even photos cannot always be relied upon", he stated; "one was an ordinary daylight snap, the other being by 'flashlight'" (*FW*, 1914 (50(1290):543)). Whilst surprised, Dragoon fanciers, however, seemed unconcerned that they had been fooled by a trick of the light, continuing instead to debate the 'correct' aesthetics of the breed. Nonetheless, this example illustrates the difficulties pigeon exhibitors had in capturing the aesthetics of their birds on camera.



Figure 5.63: A trick of the light: two photographs of the same bird, 1914

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1914 (50(1282):99)

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated, using the example of fancy pigeons, the ways in which humans can shape animals physically and metaphorically – through selective breeding, the production of standards, physical manipulation, and artistic representation – emphasising the fragility and pliability of Nature. Fancy pigeon aesthetics were ephemeral, continuously being redefined and reproduced due to changing tastes, sometimes using contentious methods. Human fashions, then, were the driving force behind acts that spanned love and torture, pigeon fanciers demonstrating care and compassion, but also a practicality and

ruthlessness. These pigeon fanciers exhibited different types of attachment to birds, at once showing affection for all birds of a particular breed – such as advocates of the Almond Tumbler – and for particularly ‘perfect’ individuals. Fancy pigeons, therefore, provide an interesting study of human-animal relationships under domestication.

Fancy pigeons were understood and framed through a series of practices and institutions, exhibitions providing fascinating examples of human-animal aesthetic encounters. Knowing was through seeing, pigeon fanciers emphasising the predominantly visual nature of their judgements, their birds subjected to a scrutinising gaze. Thus, the fancier-pigeon entanglements involved in practices of breeding, preparing, and exhibiting fancy pigeons not only relied upon fanciers’ knowledge and experience, but also helped *produce* knowledge and understanding of fancy pigeons. Fancy pigeons were accumulations, selectively bred – and physically manipulated – in fanciers’ attempts to achieve ‘perfect’, ‘beautiful’ specimens corresponding to the imagined, impossible ‘ideal’.

Fancy pigeons became works of ‘art’, although attempts to faithfully capture the spectacle of their feathered bodies in painted and photographic form proved, like attempts to define and breed the ‘ideal’, to be challenging. Their depiction in paintings and photographs acted as a further form of domestication, an attempt to define, control, and, in some cases, change pigeon aesthetics. These birds were constantly being reconfigured and re-appropriated by fanciers, the effects of subjective tastes and changing standards continually (re)making pigeons’ lives and bodies. Whilst this chapter has explored the ‘Fancy’ as a branch of animal husbandry, some alternative definitions of the term ‘fancy’ have become arguably just as pertinent, such as those associated with taste, extravagance, fantasy, and imagination (*OED*, 2016[online]). The pigeon show, a contest of avian aesthetics, also became a contest of competing definitions of ‘beauty’, as well as battles for recognition, pride, and prestige. The human-animal interactions involved in pigeon exhibiting, therefore, challenge and expand definitions of animal domestication. Fancy pigeons were transient birds, constantly in-the-making, and becoming profoundly cultural objects amidst the rapidly changing aesthetic landscape of both pigeon fancying and society in general.

Chapter 6 On Your Marks: The Social World of Long-Distance Pigeon Racing

As an organised sport in Britain, long-distance pigeon racing gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century, facilitated by the growth of the railway network. The term 'long-distance', it appears, was not formally quantified, distances ranging from 50-100 miles for inland races, to 400-800 miles for races from the Scottish islands, France, or Spain. In contrast, early races pre-dating railways were necessarily much shorter, this alternative branch of the racing Fancy known as 'short-distance' racing, and the birds referred to as 'Milers'. As the name suggests, 'short-distance' races were on a local-scale, sometimes as short as one mile. The birds were taken on foot to their liberation, often "in a brown-paper bag, with a few holes in to give air", and they flew swiftly back to their loft very low to the ground (Tegetmeier, 1867:367). The sources used in this thesis almost entirely neglected short-distance racing, *The Racing Pigeon* explicitly stating that its purpose was "to improve the status of long-distance pigeon racing" (RP, 1925 (44(2233):609)). The two types of racing were, the paper argued, "on different lines" and their association was "not desirable", the paper simultaneously reporting and shaping the sport of long-distance racing (RP, 1925 (44(2233):609)).

The difference between the two branches of the sport, other than distance, is difficult to pinpoint. Fulton (1880) suggested that short-distance pigeon racing was considerably less popular, having a bad reputation for being disorganised and informal. It was considered 'low', he claimed, because it encouraged gambling and because clubs met in public houses, although, as this chapter will discuss, this was also true of long-distance pigeon racing. Johnes (2007) proposes, instead, that there was a class-based tension between the two sports, short-distance flying more affordable and almost exclusively working-class. Clapson (1992:99), for instance, claims that short-distance racing in the north-west was popular in poorer areas, "more rough-and-ready, and less well-endowed with cash...[with] no large gardens or airy lofts". Indeed, *long-distance* racing, with the potentially expensive cost of travel, enticed the middle classes, thus challenging the common association of racing pigeons with the working classes (Clapson, 1992; Johnes, 2007). Long-distance racing was also, however,

very popular with the working classes, who, despite their financial position, were able to compete against their wealthier counterparts (see Section 6.2).

A further possible reason for long-distance racers distinguishing their sport may have been prestige, long-distance races – with their higher entry fees and bigger prizes – attracting competition on regional and national scales, and involving additional organisational, logistical, geographical, and physical challenges due to their distance. Indeed, many influential long-distance pigeon racers had initially begun as short-distance racers in the days before long-distance racing, and regarded their new sport as the improvement or progression of pigeon racing. In 1916, during wartime restrictions on racing, the National Union of Short Distance Flyers was formed. The Union had a predominantly northern bias – clubs based in the north-east, north-west, and Birmingham – supporting common claims that racing was most popular in northern England (Mott, 1973; Clapson, 1992). Nonetheless, the Union was held in disdain by long-distance racers and, from the end of the nineteenth century, short-distance racing across Britain “was in retreat and being replaced” by the long-distance form (Johnes, 2007:364).

The following two chapters explore the sport of *long*-distance pigeon racing – the “more formalized and socially diverse” form of racing (Johnes, 2007:364) – due to its much broader geography, the sport’s added distance fashioning interesting geographical, social, and logistical nuances. The sport developed alongside a public aerial imagination and desire to conquer the skies, as humans themselves were trying to master the art of flight. This chapter explores the social world of long-distance racing, revealing some of the people and organisational bodies that structured the sport. By investigating some of the spatial and temporal logistics of these races, it is hoped to give an insight into the intricacies of the sport’s organisation, and the challenges of racing over longer distances. It was through this blueprint for races that racer-pigeon encounters were shaped and their identities co-produced, races becoming contests between both avian and human contestants.

6.1. The Origins of British Long-Distance Pigeon Racing

British pigeon racers placed the origin of long-distance pigeon racing as a competitive sport in early-nineteenth-century Belgium, where, *The Racing Pigeon* stated, it was “the national sport, almost universally indulged in” (*RP*, 1899 (2(53):242)). At the time, Belgium was a relatively ‘young’ country, having only seceded from the Netherlands in 1830 (Omond, 1919). British pigeon racers believed the country’s success was in its small densely populated urban centres, which allowed fair competition and were linked by a network of railways. According to contemporary pigeon racing journalist Marie Ditcher (1991), the origin of Belgium’s pigeon racing lay in the use of pigeons as commercial messengers before the invention of telegraphs. Early-nineteenth century Belgian firms were reportedly the first to see an opportunity to ‘improve’ their pigeons, “breeding a faster strain of ‘carrier’ pigeon” to gain “great commercial advantages” (Ditcher, 1991:8). As inter-district competition grew, the development of this into a sport, Ditcher (1991:8) claims, was “the next logical step” and, with the use of telegraphs from the 1850s leaving messenger pigeons redundant, the Belgian sport could progress.

British racers admired Belgian pigeon racing – its careful organisation, its fast ‘*pigeons voyageurs*’, and its challenging races – and reportedly began importing Belgian birds in the 1880s. *The Racing Pigeon* regularly featured articles by Belgian ‘experts’ and translated extracts from Belgian newspapers, British long-distance racing becoming closely entangled with its Continental counterpart. From the early-twentieth century, however, as the British sport grew, Belgian racers began importing birds – and ideas – from Britain. This close relationship became even more important after World War One, when British birds were donated to repopulate destroyed Belgian lofts and revive the sport. Thus, Belgium’s identity as a small, and yet emerging, ambitious, and internationally well-connected country was performed through the sport of long-distance pigeon racing. The inherent internationalism of the sport – which, by definition, involved crossing international borders (and airspace) – is a theme that will recur throughout the next two chapters.

One of the earliest long-distance pigeon races in Britain, known as the 'Grand Anglo-Belgian Concours', was organised by naturalist William Tegetmeier, in 1871, in conjunction with the National Belgian Concours (fig. 6.1). The race was for *Belgian* birds, but took place from the Crystal Palace, "so public a locality", Tegetmeier (1871:121) claimed, as to attract visitors, capture the British imagination, and promote the sport. "The event aroused widespread interest", Tegetmeier arranging two 'tosses' from the Crystal Palace the following year: one to Brussels and one – 'All England' race – to lofts in England (Richardson, 1916:62). Tegetmeier was reputedly one of the most influential promoters of long-distance racing in Britain – labelled "the Father of Pigeon-Fanciers" (Richardson, 1916:51) – having studied the Belgian sport very closely and also campaigned strongly for military use of racing pigeons (Richardson, 1916). He also took a scientific interest in the advancement of the sport, publishing *The Homing or Carrier Pigeon* (1871), as well as giving lectures and demonstrations about '*le pigeon voyageur*' to the public and to the Royal Engineers' Institute (Richardson, 1916).



Figure 6.1: "The first pigeon race from the Crystal Palace to Belgium, 1871", Tegetmeier shown left
Source: Richardson (1916:75)

Whilst the development of the railway network – facilitating longer races – and the introduction of telegraphy for commercial uses in the 1850s – leaving trained messenger pigeons redundant – laid the foundations for British long-distance racing in the first half of the nineteenth century, the sport was relatively slow to take off. Throughout the late-nineteenth century, races gradually became longer, the first one-day 500-mile race reportedly flown in 1896. By the 1920s, an editorial in *The Racing Pigeon* stated, such distances were "accomplished with

greater regularity...due to better management and better pigeons" (*RP*, 1925 (44(2233):609)). As well as the distances increasing, so too was the sport's popularity and, with it, its competitive nature. At the turn of the twentieth century, *The Racing Pigeon* estimated that there were "between ten and twenty thousand" pigeon racers in Britain, a network of clubs – governed by the National Homing Union (est. 1896) – growing exponentially (*RP*, 1902 (8(328):12)). The stakes were also increasing, racers reportedly making "about ten times the amount of monetary profit" (*RP*, 1904 (13(590):21)), and successful birds referred to as "gold mines" (*RP*, 1935 (62(2754):iii)). Nonetheless, "the true fancier", the paper claimed, gained as much "pride and pleasure in getting his birds home...as he does in winning a good prize" (*RP*, 1899 (3(75):100)).

6.1.2 Osman and Logan

Two influential figures in the development and advancement of British long-distance pigeon racing – and important to discussion in the following chapters – were Alfred H. Osman and John W. Logan. Whilst not suggesting that they were the chief – nor, indeed, the only – individuals shaping the fabric of long-distance pigeon racing, their contributions were significant to the sport's organisation.

According to his entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Alfred Osman (1864-1930), a solicitor's clerk, originally took up short-distance racing, in the days before long-distance racing was popular, despite his father's strong objections (Pottle, 2004[online]). Osman's first club was Essex Homing Society, and he soon began to race his birds further, founding the London North Road Federation (est. 1896) – of which he was President – and co-founding the National Flying Club (est. 1897), becoming Secretary until his death in 1930. Osman was also a prolific writer, co-founding *The Racing Pigeon* (est. 1898) – writing under the *nom de plume* 'Squills' – and occasionally contributing to *The Stock-Keeper*, *Fanciers' Gazette*, *Homing News*, and *The Feathered World*. From 1899, he published his annual *Squills Diary*, and later published several practical books for both fancy and racing pigeon fanciers. Osman's own strain of racing pigeons became well-known and highly-valued. His 'Old Billy' (fig. 6.2), born in 1888, was described as "a truly remarkable pigeon" and cited by racers as the "foundation" of his strain (*RP*, 1930 (51(2474):213)). Old Billy – who had a prestigious Belgian ancestry – became synonymous with Osman's racing success,

the two closely intertwined. After his death in 1930, his son took over his loft and paper, continuing to uphold the prestige of the Osman strain, which had become an embodiment of his father's legacy (fig. 6.3).



Figure 6.2: "Old Billy", 1902

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1902 (8(328):10)

CHILDREN OF "OLYMPIC"

Red Chequer Cock
NURP.38.NM.501
Son of "Olympic"

Blue Chequer Hen
NURP.38.NE.2115
Daughter of "Olympic"

and Dame of 1st Newark, King's Cross H.S., 1923, Thurso, 1924, and the 1925 Lerwick Prize winner. Has bred other winners for me and other fanciers.

OSMANS WIN EVERYWHERE

In Ireland.—1st and 4th in Irish Grand National from Les Sables (a disaster) in 1932 contained Osman blood.

In Scotland.—2nd and 4th Rennes National, 1933, contained Osman blood, 3rd and 4th Rennes Disaster, 1936, contains much Osman blood. Mr. A. Nall, Lugar, won Scottish National, Nantes, mostly Osman.

Mr. Harry Brown of Styal has been for several years a big prize-winner in Manchester F.C. with his Osmans.

In 1933, "Her Majesty Silver Queen" (winner of the King's Cup in the Irish Grand National from Les Sables d'Olonne, 600 miles, only six home in race time) contained much Osman blood.

"News of the World" 1933 Championship winner of £195 was an Osman.

"Estuary Queen," 2nd Rennes Open Race, London Col. Society, 1933, was bred by me and presented to Captain E. G. Burden—an Osman. She and her mate "Estuary King" are responsible for winners for him from Sladford, York, Morpeth, Fraserburgh (438 miles) and Thurso (514 miles).

Slade Bros., 1st and 2nd Fraserburgh—London N.R. Combine, 1933, were full of Osman blood.

Mr. Hardcastle won King George V Cup and 1st in National F.C. Mirande race with an Osman.

G. H. Stege, Junr., of Noroton, Connecticut, states that progeny of Mealy Cock, NURP.33.3364, were to a large extent responsible for his winning average speed—a hen from this cock won 1st and all Pools in 500 mile race—finishing in on day of liberation, and a nestmate was one of only three home on day in 200 mile smash. Yearling hen who won the 500 mile race also won 2nd in 500 mile Young Bird race.

Heathcote Bros. won Major Osman's Cup for longest O.B. race, Libourne, 566 miles, in 1933, in the Central Counties F.C. with an Osman. In 1936 they won 1st North Staffs. Fed. Open Marennes race (779 birds), by approximately 4 hours—the only bird on the day—and 5th G.C.F.C. Rennes race—both were Osmans. In 1937 they still scored with Osmans.

Mr. C. L. Drinkwater won the London N.R. Combine, Lerwick (Smash) in 1936, only 2 birds home in race-time, with a hen containing a lot of Osman blood, being a descendant of the Policeman.

Mr. Harry Reifel of Vancouver B.C. won the Ashland 500-mile race with an Osman—bred from 3208 x 7409—both bred by Major Osman.

Major Osman sent one pigeon to San Sebastian—one prize; two pigeons to Lerwick—both home.

Mr. R. T. Lyman, flying in the U.S.A. in the Boston Central Combine 600-mile race in 1935 from Detroit timed in four birds to win prizes—ALL OSMANS.

W. Berry, of Macclesfield, won 1st and 2nd Manchester F.C. open race, 1934, with Osmans. In 1937 he won the Laval race Manchester F.C. with an Osman.

V. Robinson's "Renown" and "Jeannie"—each flown San Sebastian eight times—are Osmans.

MAJOR W. H. OSMAN
19, Doughty Street, LONDON, W.C.1

Figure 6.3: Advert for 'Osmans', 1938

Source: *Squills Diary* (1938 :51-52)

Alfred Osman also contributed significantly as an Officer in World War One (fig. 6.4), for which he was awarded an OBE (Pottle, 2004[online]). At the outbreak of World War One, Captain Osman – later Lieutenant-Colonel – established the Carrier Pigeon Service (CPS), from which evolved pigeon services in the Army, Air Forces, and Navy (Osman, 1928). He set up the Voluntary Pigeon War Committee to distribute pigeons to the various military lofts, members of which

included MP Mr Handel Booth and businessman Godfrey Isaacs as wireless experts, along with pigeon racers from the National Homing Union Council (Osman, 1928).



Figure 6.4: "Officer-in-charge War Office Pigeon Service", Alfred Osman (then Captain), 1916

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1916 (35(1740):supplement)

Using his newspaper, Osman appealed to racers to donate birds, himself personally examining "the 100,000 birds that were used in the Service" (*RP*, 1928 (48(2404):434)). Whilst tales of wartime messenger pigeons have become proud national stories (Gardiner, 2006) – indeed, Osman (1928) claimed that 95% of messages during World War One were successfully delivered – it is interesting that at the time there were doubts even amongst pigeon racers about the potential of the CPS. Some letters to *The Racing Pigeon*, for instance, suggested that pigeons were "a frail prop to lean on", limited by weather conditions and the dangers of crossing the Channel (*RP*, 1914 (33(1650-1):231)).

The outbreak of War also had a huge influence on the racers and pigeons left at home, Osman attempting to protect their interests at this difficult time. The vertical volume became an important arena for targeting and protecting nations, international borders and airspace serving as powerful sites of conflict. The mobility of the racing pigeon, at a time when aeroplanes and aerial warfare were in their infancy, was seen as a real threat to public security (cf. Pearson, 2016). In August 1914, *The Racing Pigeon* announced that the War Office had banned all racing, training, and transportation of birds by rail under the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act. Due to suspicion that pigeons were being used as spies, the Police visited lofts, ordering for birds to have their wings clipped or be killed (Osman,

1928). Aerial nonhuman lives were, then, politically charged and carefully regulated during this time.

Described as “instrumental”, Osman liaised with the Home Office and the Police, successfully lobbying for permits allowing fanciers to continue keeping racing – and fancy – pigeons (fig. 6.5), 500,000 of which were issued under the Defence of the Realm Regulation 21 (*RP*, 1930 (51(2474):213)). On May 1st 1916, Osman convinced members of the War Office and Home Office to allow racing to recommence, albeit on a smaller and restricted scale, the ‘Conditions of training’ published and circulated to both railway companies (Railway Executive Committee, Circular No.609, 7th July 1916) and pigeon racers:

“birds to be liberated only by Station Officials at or in the immediate vicinity of a railway station. No birds to be liberated at or consigned from stations less than 20 miles from the coast...Not more than 200 birds (or 8 baskets) to be sent in one consignment” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1758):293)).

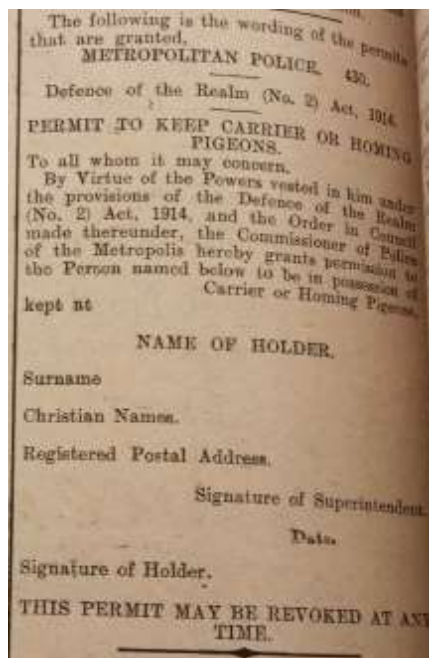


Figure 6.5: Wording for Police Permits, 1914

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1914 (33(1654):250)

This revival was vital to “keep the birds fit and keep interest alive”, so that racing could restart after the War (*RP*, 1916 (35(1736):5)). The quality of birds left behind in lofts, Osman worried, would deteriorate if left unraced. “The non-use”

of their abilities, he claimed, echoing Darwin, would create “fat-legged walking birds[s] with spectacles” (fig. 6.6) (*RP*, 1916 (35(1754):249)).

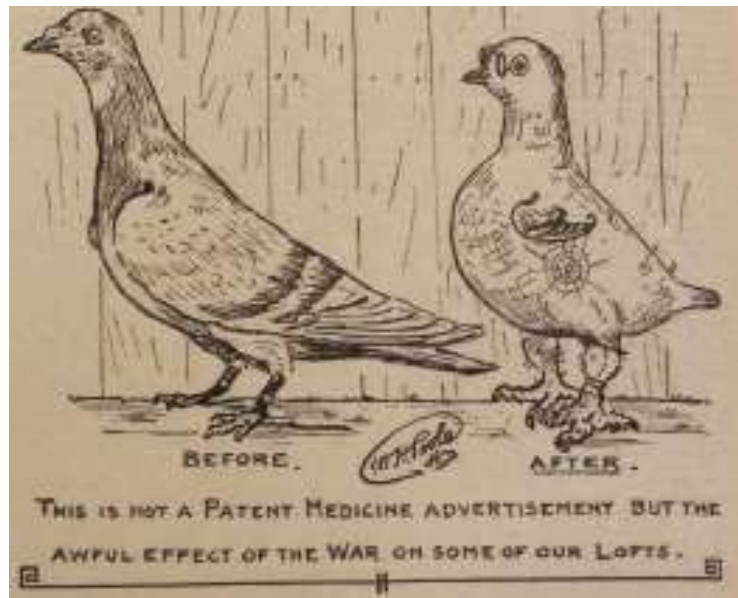


Figure 6.6: “Awful Effect”: possible physical effects of war on pigeons, 1916
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1916 (35(1754):249

When the War ended, “all unnecessary restrictions relative to pigeon racing” were removed (*RP*, 1918 (37(1887):372)). The work of Alfred Osman was appreciated by pigeon racers, who, in 1920, presented him with £220 at a testimonial. Osman died on March 30th 1930, described by his own newspaper as “one of the foremost figures...a pioneer of long-distance racing” (*RP*, 1930 (51(2474):213)), and by *The Feathered World* as a “great homing authority...so constant a friend” (*FW*, 1930 (82(2128):600)).

A further influential figure in British long-distance pigeon racing was John William Logan MP (1845-1925) (fig. 6.7), a friend of Osman’s “often referred to [by racers] as the greatest figure in the history of British racing” (Ditcher, 1991:75). According to Osman, Logan was “practically the founder of the sport in England” (*RP*, 1902 (8(328):12)). “An Irishman of substantial wealth” and passionate hunter, Logan worked as a railway engineer for his father’s firm ‘Logan and Hemingway’, later becoming Liberal MP for Harborough (Ditcher, 1911:75). As an important figure in Liberal political history, he was reportedly the “working-men’s friend”, using his wealth and influence to make long-distance racing fair to all (*RP*, 1902 (9(402):368)).



Figure 6.7: "Mr J.W. Logan, MP", 1898

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(1):23)

Almost twenty years older than Osman, Logan began racing in the late 1860s, when races were only short-distance. Nonetheless, he reportedly strived to push the sport's limits, flying his birds further and faster than any before. In 1879, despite his racing successes, Logan cleared out his loft at East Langton, Leicestershire, replacing his birds with some of the best Belgian birds, including every racing pigeon belonging to his good friend Mr N. Barker, an Englishman who had become one of the most successful pigeon racers in Belgium. This, "was one of the greatest blessings that could have been bestowed on the sport of long-distance racing", Osman wrote, "these birds are undoubtedly the foundation of some of the best strains descended from them today" (*RP*, 1923 (42(2146:861)).

In the 1880s, Logan founded the United Counties F.C., cited as "the first organisation to make long distance racing possible in England" (*RP*, 1922 (41(2096):847)). During this decade, Osman wrote, Logan organised "some of the first races that really founded the sport of long distance racing" (*Squills Diary*, 1907 [pp94 in R. Osman, 1997]). In 1886, in a reputedly "famous race" from La Rochelle, some of Logan's birds became the first to fly 400 miles in one day, the race won by Logan's 'Old 86' (*Squills Diary*, 1907 [pp94 in R. Osman, 1997]). The Logan strain, with its strong Belgian pedigree, became one of the most valued strains in British racing. Old 86 was one of his most well-known birds, its photograph appearing on the front page of every edition of *The Racing Pigeon* (fig. 6.8). The reputations of Logan and his birds became closely linked, Osman stating: "Mr. J.W. Logan's name in the racing pigeon world will ever be associated with his famous 'Old 86'" (*RP*, 1899 (2(52):228)).



Figure 6.8: Old 86 on the front cover of 'The Racing Pigeon'

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(8):cover)

In 1896, Logan became the first President of the sport's governing body, the National Homing Union, and, the following year, helped establish the National Flying Club with Osman, also becoming President. In 1898, upon co-founding *The Racing Pigeon* – again, with Osman – Logan published his 1895 pamphlet *The Pigeon Fancier's Guide* as a series of articles in the paper, later publishing his influential *Pigeon Racer's Handbook* in 1922 (2nd edition, 1924). However, in November 1923, due to ill-health, Logan announced his retirement from the sport. At auction, his 104 birds reportedly raised £3,271, one of which was sold for a record price of £225 (fig. 6.9) (*LMS* (1929 (6(2):44); Ogdens, 1931, No.35). Logan died on May 25th 1925, Osman expressing "sorrow at the loss of the greatest benefactor this paper and the sport of Pigeon Racing ever had" (*RP*, 1925 (44(2223):397)).



Figure 6.9: Logan's £225 'record price' pigeon

Source: Ogdens (1931) *Racing Pigeons*, No.35

6.2 The Pigeon Racers

Whilst a few individuals gave momentum to the development of the sport, thousands of pigeon racers made up the social world of long-distance pigeon racing, forming what Johnes (2007:362) terms “overlapping subcultures”.

Despite long-distance races being more expensive to enter than short-distance races – due to transport costs – the sport did not exclude the working classes. In fact, racers’ testimonies in books and *The Racing Pigeon* suggested that, as one racer summarised, the working classes comprised “the greater portion of the Fancy” (*RP*, 1905 (15(709):285)). Racers regularly emphasised the flexibility of the sport, participating to an extent that suited their finances and spare time. The prices of racing pigeons varied, perceived ‘value’ largely related to their pedigree, their owner’s reputation, and their past performances (see Chapter 7). Most birds advertised in *The Racing Pigeon* cost less than £1 – according to Burnett’s (1969) aforementioned estimations, almost one week’s wages for a lot of the working classes – and some cost only a couple of shillings, even into the 1930s. Whilst the majority of birds were affordable, some of the most expensive birds for sale in the paper cost £5-£10 and birds sold at auction could, as the abovementioned auction of Logan’s birds demonstrated, be sold for a lot more.

The Racing Pigeon took pride in the sport’s social diversity, consciously identifying working-class racers in its pages, one racer writing: “no one can help but admire working men who overcome all difficulties and force themselves to the front rank of the fancy” (*RP*, 1899 (2(53):243)). An article in 1899, for instance, entitled ‘A typical working man fancier’ detailed the loft of Mr John Woodward, a Lancashire miner who had “upwards of fifty magnificent birds”, more than most working-class racers (*RP*, 1899 (2(48):164)). “Repeatedly has it taken one, and sometimes two, whole week’s earnings in the coal mine to purchase birds”, the article wrote (*RP*, 1899 (2(48):164)).

Working-class racers, however, faced a number of challenges, mainly due to their limited finances. Some formed partnerships, sharing the cost, whilst others only entered races with cheaper transport costs and lower risk of losing birds. Indeed, one racer warned that pigeon racing was “twenty-five percent pleasure and seventy five per cent losses, grievances, and bally hump”, due to bad weather, hawk attacks, and Channel crossings (*RP*, 1904 (13(590):21)). Working-class

racers also reportedly restricted the number of birds that they kept, aiming for “quality, not quantity”, and could not afford expensive appliances such as timing clocks (see Section 6.7) (*RP*, 1899 (2(40):38)). Space restrictions suffered by the working classes could also be detrimental, their birds “shut up in a small loft”, often home-made – in backyards or at allotments – causing overcrowding and disease (*RP*, 1899 (2(40):38)). Another challenge was finding spare time to tend to their birds, most working-class racers working Monday to mid-day Saturday (*RP*, 1904 (13(618):493)). As one miner, in 1899, wrote: “when a man goes to work at 5 o’clock in the morning, he must have someone to look after his birds”, such as a friend or family member (*RP*, 1899 (2(53(243))). Daylight Saving Time, however, introduced in 1916, “proved an especial boon” to working racers, giving them more hours of daylight after work for training birds (Ogden’s, 1931, No.21).

A challenge faced by all pigeon racers, regardless of class, was an apparent “prejudice against the sport”, similar to that felt by fancy pigeon exhibitors (*RP*, 1899 (2(51):210)). Some members of the public reportedly deemed pigeon racers to be inferior, associating the sport “with pot-house loaders and all that is objectionable and vulgar” (*RP*, 1899 (2(51):210)). Early short-distance racing, as revealed, involved gambling, the sport carried out in a supposedly “distasteful” manner (*RP*, 1914 (37(1843):16)). Indeed, fancy pigeon writer Joseph Lucas (1886:11) expressed his “abhorrence”, stating: “when the money question enters into the calculation, the love of the thing is bowed out”. Whilst a form of popular mathematics and scientific sensibility, gambling during the Victorian and Edwardian eras was seen as a moral and social problem, campaigns against it framing it as wasteful and irrational (Clapson, 1992). Long-distance racing, however, also involved betting, in the form of pools. *The Racing Pigeon* warned that pools carried “the taint of gambling”, casting a “blemish or legal taint” on the sport (*RP*, 1911 (26(1291):331)), Osman worrying that some birds were used “as tools to satisfy...terrific gambling appetite” (*Squills Diary*, 1920 [pp182 in R. Osman, 1997]).

Other racers suggested that it was the spaces in which racing clubs met that tainted public opinion. Like other clubs and societies in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, meetings usually took place in public houses (fig. 6.10), spaces demonised by Temperance reformers as ‘immoral’, as discussed in Chapter 4. Indeed, one letter to *The Racing Pigeon* indicated that some racers

drank too much at meetings and made “beasts of themselves” (*RP*, 1905 (15(732):741)). Clapson (1992:2) explains that both gambling and drinking “threatened the virtues of hard work, thrift and self-denial, as propounded by Victorian moralists”. Ditcher (1991:34), in her history of long-distance pigeon racing, adds that “the greatest criterion of the Victorian times was respectability...a person did not get drunk or behave wildly in public...people were expected to dress tidily and keep their houses clean”. ‘Respectability’ was a key concept of middle-class Victorian morality, emphasising the importance of ‘character’ and behaviour, with good manners, self-help, and independence imperative to appropriate comportment (Himmelfarb, 2007). The concept was, however, also important to the working classes, who desired to be respected and drew distinctions amongst themselves between ‘respectable’ and ‘rough’ working-class citizens (Himmelfarb, 2007). For some members of the public, then, pastimes associated with gambling and drinking, such as pigeon racing, were not ‘respectable’.



Figure 6.10: “*The Vaughan Arms H.S. Annual*”, 1910, held at the public house after which the Society was named

Source: *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1910:50)

Whilst some believed that the sport had mostly “lived down its bad name” by the early-twentieth century, pigeon racers still faced some opposition (*RP*, 1899 (2(51):210)). One of the legacies of this negative public image was felt by council house residents in the 1930s, landlords and local councils restricting tenants from keeping some domestic animals, including pigeons. This reportedly posed a “serious threat to the sport”, councils claiming that racing pigeons were “likely to lower the tone of the neighbourhood” (*RP*, 1933 (57(2639):298)). By 1935, however, *The Racing Pigeon* reported that “a large number of Housing Authorities in England and Wales permit[ted] the keeping of pigeons”, local councils beginning to lift restrictions due to strong reminders of the usefulness of racing pigeons in the event of another war (*RP*, 1935 (61(2728):89)).

Whilst the sport was sometimes framed by non-racers in a negative way, racers regularly wrote to *The Racing Pigeon* discussing their sport’s perceived *benefits*. Recreation amongst the working classes, one racer stated, was essential, “lifting [them] out of the monotonous groove” of everyday life and work (*RP*, 1904 (13(618):493)). Interestingly, some argued that pigeon racing formed “a strong counter attraction to the public-house”, framing it as ‘healthy’ leisure (*RP*, 1899 (2(52):227)). Others argued that the sport taught them desirable qualities such as “patience, ingenuity, forethought, and shrewdness” (*RP*, 1899 (2(43):78)). Indeed, Logan admitted that his passion for pigeons was “because they call forth a man’s intelligence” (*RP*, 1899 (2(50):194)). There was “always something new to learn” in pigeon racing, an editorial claimed, a challenge that enticed racers (*RP*, 1899 (2(51):210)). Thus, like pigeon exhibitors, racers viewed their sport as a way of ‘improving’ themselves, echoing the ways in which they aimed to ‘improve’ the physical and mental capacities of their birds (see Chapter 7).

Furthermore, pigeon racing fostered a sense of collective identity and community, one racer calling this a “fellow-feeling linking real fanciers of all ranks and classes....knitted more closely together in a mutual respect and esteem” (*RP*, 1899 (2(43):78)). In his *Clubman’s Handbook*, Osman – himself closely involved in the Volunteer Movement and Freemasonry – wrote that the success of clubs depended on “unity and good fellowship” amongst members (Squills, 1912:3), later maintaining that “in pigeon fanciers there is a tie greater even than Freemasonry” (*RP*, 1925 (44(2210):166)). Although racers were united in their sport, they also sought to improve their own social status amongst

the racing Fancy. As one racer explained, racers relished “the triumphant march...up to the club-house, to receive the congratulations of his mates” (*RP*, 1899 (2(43):78)). The sport was, therefore, underpinned by personal battles for pride and status. Racers saw their sport as a form of moral, intellectual, and social ascension, this mirroring the soaring aerial mobility and ascension of their birds.

Whilst pigeon racing was a popular working-class sport, it had a much wider socio-economic reach, “from the artisan to the highest in the land”, *The Feathered World’s* racing correspondent wrote (*FW*, 1910 (43(1098):vi)). Some of the most prominent men in the sport were, in fact, from more privileged backgrounds, including doctors, lawyers, and politicians. Osman stated that “for the good name of the sport” to continue, men “of some social position and standing” should make up club committees (Squills, 1912:5). Railway staff magazines also remarked that the sport was “followed by all ranks and conditions of men” (*GWR*, 1932 (44(5):191)), and an Ogdens (1931, No.41) cigarette card told the public that racers came from “all walks of life”. Most racers agreed, nonetheless, that the working-class racer was “on as near an equal footing as possible with his more fortunate brethren”, competing in – and sometimes winning – the same local and national races (*RP*, 1899 (2(48):166)). Indeed, an Ogdens (1931, No.47) cigarette card entitled ‘A working man’s champion’ explained to the non-racing public: “the working man has just as much chance as the millionaire”. This was, in theory, true: racers agreed that knowledge and experience of racing was not bound by class and that their birds were ultimately responsible for the outcomes of races (see Chapter 7). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that middle-class racers had an advantage, having more money, space, and time, to breed and train more – and potentially *better* – birds.

Osman claimed that social distinctions were “practically unknown” in the sport (Squills, 1912:5). This, however, seems contradictory since, as already explained, books and the pigeon press regularly celebrated working-class achievements against supposed adversity. Furthermore, there was, it seems, almost a celebrity culture amongst the racing Fancy. In 1911, *The Racing Pigeon* launched a competition to identify twelve caricatures of “well-known fanciers” (fig. 6.11) (*RP*, 1911 (26(1280):176)). It is not clear how readers would have known their faces – whether from the limited number of photographs in the press, or having met them at events – although “only one competitor got the solution complete”

(*RP*, 1911 (26(1288):285)). The racers depicted were, however, all common names in the paper, actively involved in the organisation of the sport, including Osman, Dr Tresidder (see Section 6.6 and Chapter 7), and Dr W.E. Barker, author of *Pigeon Racing* (1913).



Figure 6.11: Dr Tresidder (left), Lt.-Col. Osman (centre), Dr W.E. Barker (right)
Sources: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1911 (26(1277):13); (26(1278):153); (26(1286):261)

Perhaps the most high-profile of all pigeon racers, at the other end of the spectrum to working-class racers, were the Royal Family (Ogdens, 1931, No.14). The first homing pigeons kept at Sandringham's Royal Lofts were a gift from King Leopold II of Belgium, in 1888, these birds kept as breeders (*RP*, 1898 (1(1):7)). Mr J. Walter Jones (fig. 6.12) reportedly donated the first birds used to race there, in the 1890s, and was later employed as loft manager (*RP*, 1898 (1(1):7)). King Edward VII (then Prince of Wales) and his son George (later King George V), raced these pigeons with the London Flying Club, Midland Flying Club, and National Flying Club. The birds reputedly became pigeon royalty, their superior 'blood' and impressive – largely Belgian – pedigrees regularly commented upon in *The Racing Pigeon*. Indeed, four birds listed on the 1906 national stud list, compiled by Osman, (see Chapter 7) belonged to King Edward VII and three to

George (then Prince of Wales). Despite this reputation, Osman noted, the Royal birds had not created disparities between classes, claiming that “few strains have done more to help improve working men’s lofts” (*RP*, 1925 (44(2210):166)). Many racers believed that the Royal Family’s patronage greatly improved the sport’s reputation, publicity, and popularity, one working-class racer adding: “it is nice to think our birds can compete against kings, lords, and dukes” (*RP*, 1927 (2322):350)).



Figure 6.12: “Their Majesties the King [George V] and Queen inspecting racing pigeons at York Cottage, Sandringham”, with Mr Jones (left), 1925

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1925 (44(2210):supplement)

Despite claiming to be socially inclusive, pigeon racing was – as previous historical studies have shown (Johnes, 2007) – “a man’s game” (*RP*, 1899 (2(50):194)). A lot of correspondence from racers in *The Racing Pigeon*, in fact, portrayed women as adversaries of the sport. “Some wives get jealous”, one lady explained, “because they think their husbands devote more time to pigeons than to them” (*RP*, 1929 (49(2421):208)). Indeed, some wives wrote to the paper in frustration, one explaining: “you can’t go to church for the birds are expected any time...and you can’t go anywhere in the afternoon...you daren’t speak...for fear of making a noise, and the children have got to be kept inside” (*RP*, 1929 (49(2144):42)). Perhaps not surprisingly, then, at the 1930 London Columbarian dinner, Major W.H. Osman proposed a toast ‘to the ladies’, “as the wives of pigeon fanciers...had much to put up with” (*RP*, 1930 (56(2615):425)). Some women, conversely, argued that the sport was beneficial: “by encouraging your husband to keep pigeons you are encouraging to keep him at home”, one lady wrote (*RP*,

1930 (51(2465):75)). Another stated: “I used to think it a waste of time and money...but if he didn’t keep pigeons he might spend the money on something else that might not do him any good” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2319):308)).

Whilst most pigeon racers – and, indeed, the most *prominent* racers – were men, there appears to have been more female racers (fig. 6.13) than previous research suggests (Mass Observation, 1943; Mott, 1973; Metcalfe, 1982; Johnes, 2007; Baker, 2013), most of whom admitted that they had been encouraged by male relatives. In a rare article on successful female racers, *The Racing Pigeon*, in 1908, introduced Miss Gladys Phipps as “an enthusiastic lady fancier...one of the keenest of the few lady fanciers who grace the sport” (*RP*, 1908 (20(966):225)). The article concluded that it was “a great pleasure indeed to see the Fancy taken up in serious manner by the ladies”, also listing the Hon. Mrs Jackson, Miss Pope, and Miss Brine as other “charming pioneers” of female racing (*RP*, 1908 (20(966):225)). An advert for Miss Brine’s loft in *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (fig. 6.13) shows that she was President of the East Dorset Homing Society, although women seldom held such influential committee positions. Indeed, whilst the National Flying Club named Miss Ida Logan – presumably John Logan’s daughter – and Mrs McNeil as committee members in 1899, women were rarely mentioned as club or committee members.

MISS E. BRINE, EASTLEIGH, POOLE, DORSET

(President East Dorset H.S. practically since its formation in 1902).
 Winner of nearly 400 Prizes in Show Pen, besides Numerous Prizes on the Road, Berwick (North), Marennes (South).

Pen Wins include:

ALTRINCHAM,
 BIRKENHEAD,
 PALACE,
 DAIRY,
 LONDON,
 NATIONAL,
 BRISTOL,
 and other important Shows.



MISS E. BRINE.

Strains in Loft chiefly
 BURROWS,
 J. W. CUTHBERT,
 and the very best
 TOFT and GITS
 money can buy.

I have other well-known
 Strains.

Every SQUEAKER bred will be booked during 1913 at 10/- to £1 each.

I OFFER A BEAUTIFUL SILVER CUP TO BONA-FIDE WORKING-MEN FANCIERS WHO PUTS UP THE
 BEST PERFORMANCE IN 1913 BY SQUEAKERS PURCHASED FROM THESE LOFTS.

A Small Deposit required when ordering. H.P. and R.P. Ring.

Postal Address: MISS E. BRINE, EASTLEIGH, POOLE, DORSET. Telegram: "BRINE, POOLE."

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Figure 6.13: Miss Brine's advert, 1913 (top); "Mrs E.M. Danton", 1929 (bottom left); "Mrs Reeve, of Wickham Market", 1929 (bottom right)

Source: *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1913:95); *The Racing Pigeon*, 1929 (49(2434):441); (50(2437):38)

Whilst articles and adverts rarely mentioned women, there were, nonetheless, female pigeon racers amongst the Fancy. Between 1927 and 1930, a female pigeon racer writing under the pen-name 'Florrie' wrote a weekly column in *The Racing Pigeon*, entitled "Gentlemen – 'The Ladies'", described by one reader as "long overdue" (RP, 1927 (46(2315):250)). In it, she discussed her own involvement in the sport, gave useful advice about breeding and training, and published women's letters. She encouraged ladies to "show an interest" in their

husbands' pigeons (*RP*, 1929 (49(2421):208)), or to race pigeons themselves, stating that "they will make better fanciers than the mere men" (*RP*, 1929 (49(2429):328)). The practical advice Florrie gave did not differ from the advice given by male racers in the paper, and she often relayed advice from her husband. Some letters, however, criticised her for being "always on the husbands' side" (*RP*, 1930 (51(2469):147)).

"If there is one hobby for us women the keeping of a few pigeons it is", one lady wrote to Florrie, suggesting that the pigeon's devotion to home and family were admirable moral qualities for a married woman (*RP*, 1927 (46(2323):365)). Female racers' letters appeared to show empathy and care for pigeons, taking an almost motherly approach. One lady, for instance, wrote: "I believe in doing the same for the birds as I do in my home" (*RP*, 1927 (46(2317):281)). A lot of letters from women admitted to mothering individual birds, naming them, caring for their specific needs, taming them (fig. 6.14), and identifying with their 'personalities', developing strong, affectionate, and trusting relationships with their birds. This behaviour was, however, not solely a feminine trait, male racers also demonstrating such care (see Chapter 7). There was, nonetheless, something seemingly more feminine about the way that women described their birds. Their language appeared more elegant and loving, Florrie, for instance, stating that her birds' "feathers fit them like gloves and [were] all highly polished" (*RP*, 1930 (51(2466):94)). Such feminine romanticised language contrasts to the utilitarian approach of male racers, who, whilst describing their birds as 'beautiful' and 'good-looking', focused more on the birds being 'fit to race', 'athletic', and 'fit' (see Chapter 7).



Figure 6.14: "Mrs W.F.J." feeding a tame pigeon from her lips, 1927 (see similar, figure 7.18)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1927 (46(2317):281)

Florrie, her readers, and the paper's editors, however, worried that some letters to her column had been "written by the other sex", suggesting that the true voice of female racers was concealed, overshadowed by their husbands, or "forgotten" (*RP*, 1927 (46(2317):281; 280)). Indeed, traces of women in the paper were obscured, race results rarely stating gender, almost as if it were implied. As sports historians argue, during this time period it was common for women to be excluded from leisure activities, or their participation in them concealed. Whilst female racers did exist, few of them flew independently, most – including Florrie – racing in partnership with their husbands. Whilst this brought their involvement to the fore, it also served to disguise them. The photograph in figure 6.15, for instance, shows both Mr and Mrs Dix, although the advert, written in first person, mentions only the former. Indeed, some letters to the paper bemoaned that female racers were excluded from competitions or prizes and mocked by male counterparts. This uneven relationship appears to have been taken for granted by male and female racers alike. Even Florrie referred to her family's birds as "my hubby's pigeons", and, like most racers, referred to the pigeon racer as 'he' (*RP*, 1927 (46(2314):232)). One female racer, thus, appealed for more women to "own their own racing stud rather than be at hubby's beck and call" (*RP*, 1929 (49(2431):377)).

The High Littleton Lofts.

I shall have a Limited Number of Young Racing Pigeons for disposal


during the Season, also a few **Adult Birds** after August. Birds which will surely bring fame to the owner and breeder, with proper attention. Season 1912 was one of the hardest for racing pigeons for many years, yet the High Littleton Lofts kept up its usual good form, winning both **Old and Young Birds** Average Trophy, and was also Premier Prize Winner in Club. As **SHOW BIRDS**, my strain held its own against the best, winning a number of firsts, specials, and other prizes, 1912. My "**Spangle**" strain has a great reputation for winning **Smashes**, or very hard races, particularly so in East winds and haze, and birds of this strain have won some of the hardest races ever flown into England, under such trying conditions. That they are consistent and up-to-date, is proved by the following wins, 1912, with birds bred in the High Littleton Lofts—Mr. E. E. Jackson's 3rd Marennes, Manchester F.C., and 5th Gt. Northern; Mr. F. Gregory's 1st Nantes, Liverpool & Dis. Fed. Open Race, 2nd Nantes, Southport Fed., 2nd Nantes, North West Combine (3,000 birds competing), also other prizes; Mr. A. D. Allen's H.P. Rennes winner, and my own Rennes and Bordeaux winners.

ALL THE ABOVE PERFORMANCES GAINED IN ABSOLUTELY THE HARDEST POSSIBLE CONDITIONS FOR RACING.

My Stud Lists will be posted to all applicants who enclose three penny stamps for postage.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO—
Oliver A. Dix,
High Littleton, Near BRISTOL.

Terms for Judging (Racing Pigeons only) on application



Mr. and Mrs. O. A. DIX surrounded by their Pets.

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Figure 6.15: Advert for Mr (and Mrs?) Dix's birds, 1913

Source: *Homing Pigeon Annual* (1913:58)

Even if women did not identify themselves as ‘racers’, a lot of accounts discussed how racers’ wives helped look after the birds whilst their husbands were at work, dealing with day-to-day tasks such as feeding, cleaning, and exercising pigeons, and occasionally timing in birds during training tosses and races, strictly “according to instructions” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2323):365)). *The Racing Pigeon’s* abovementioned feature on working-class racer Mr Woodward, for example, stated the importance of his wife (fig. 6.16), who would “go in the loft, catch and basket the races, and always she will go near two miles to the station herself. Many a winner has she timed in at the post-office alone” (*RP*, 1899 (2(48):164)). As one wife summarised: “my hubby says I’m his loft manager” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2319):308)). Some women also reportedly visited the loft “secretly...to tame and train the birds”, many admitting feeling underappreciated and underestimated (*RP*, 1929 (49(2434):441)).



Figure 6.16: “Mrs Woodward”, 1899

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899 (2(48):165)

It was not only wives who helped out, children – boys and girls (fig. 6.17) – also becoming involved in the sport. One racer wrote: “my little girl loves them...she knows them all by name...and...takes all her dolls and Teddies to see the pigeons” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2319):309)). Some young girls also wrote to Florrie’s column, one ten-year old girl writing: “when daddy is cleaning the loft out, I am washing the fountains out” (*RP*, 1929 (49(2424):247)). Some were even responsible for timing in birds, one thirteen-year old’s father stating: “she knows more about them than many men do” (*RP*, 1927 (2321):335)). Pigeon racing, then, for many, was a “family care” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2312):194)).

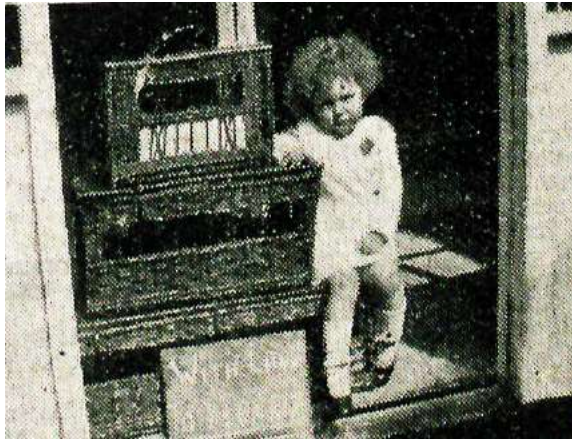


Figure 6.17: "A very young fancier", 1927

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1927 (46(2323):365)

6.3 The Clubs

Clubs – referred to as ‘flying clubs’ or ‘homing societies’ – began to form in the late-nineteenth century for the purpose of organising long-distance pigeon races. By 1902, Osman stated, there were “between 600 and 700 clubs in the United Kingdom”, although added that a lack of records made it impossible to know the exact number of clubs and racers (*RP*, 1902 (8(328):12)). Clubs were at a local scale, although varied in size – based around towns, villages, or even smaller districts – and were named after either their ‘headquarters’ – usually a public house – or the local area (Squills, 1912). As a result, multiple clubs could exist within very small areas, differentiated by the locations and dates of their races, entry fees, club subscriptions, and prizes. The bigger clubs charged higher entry fees and subscriptions, but offered larger prizes. From adverts in *The Racing Pigeon*, entry fees ranged from around 6d. to 12s.6d. per bird, subscriptions from 5s. to £1 11s.6d. per annum, and prize money from 10s. to £10.

The Clubman’s Handbook (Squills, 1912:5) laid out how to form and manage racing clubs, stating: “the object should be to improve socially and in every respect the members”. Clubs were to be well-organised, democratic bodies, with elected committees – including a chairman or president, vice-president(s), secretary, and treasurer – that held regular meetings to ensure fair-play and standardised conduct. These clubs, like their fancy counterparts, formed strong communities united by a common love of pigeons, holding regular social evenings

(fig. 6.18). Each season, clubs distributed to their members a race programme, races usually taking place on Saturdays at least once a fortnight during the season (May to late-September). The races gradually got longer over the course of the season, old birds (>1 year old) flying further distances than young birds (<1 year old). Entries varied from race to race and between clubs. Race reports from *The Racing Pigeon* show entries in club races ranging from less than 50 to over 500, racers choosing how many of their birds – and which races – to enter. Some local club races, however, limited entries to five or ten birds per competitor per race, presumably so that poorer racers could still compete for the prizes.



Figure 6.18: "London Columbarian Society Dinner", 1932

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1932 (56(2615):425)

The system of clubs in Britain was, however, also arranged on a regional scale, local clubs grouping together – or ‘federating’ – to form bodies known as ‘federations’ to increase competition, facilitate race arrangements and logistics, reduce transport costs, and increase prize money. Federations encompassed clubs within a town or county – an idea reportedly of Belgian origin – and ranged from half-a-dozen clubs to over thirty. As the number of clubs increased, Squills (1912) explained, so too did the number of federations, although their size diminished, large federations being divided and new ones formed. Likewise, neighbouring federations could group together to form ‘combines’. Both federations and combines organised supplementary races, facilitating rather than replacing local clubs.

Osman was one of the first advocates of federating in Britain, forming the London North Road Federation in 1896. The earliest federations and combines, he claimed, originated in Lancashire and “gradually extended all over the country” (Squills, 1912:11). The Lancashire Combine (est. 1902), composed of 16

federations, was one of the largest and most commonly mentioned combines, formed “for cheapness of conveying and organisation of pools” (*RP*, 1925 (44(2212):218)). Each year, the Combine organised an open race from Nantes, which *The Racing Pigeon* showcased as one of the largest events of the season. In 1905, for instance, 8,229 birds were entered, almost four times the number entered in the National Flying Club’s *national* race (see Section 6.3.1) that year.

With no club records, it is, unfortunately, only possible to speculate about the geographical spread of long-distance pigeon racing clubs. Racers’ observations in the paper suggest that the sport was very popular in northern England, emphasising its popularity amongst miners and cotton workers in Yorkshire, Northumberland, and Lancashire, the latter labelled “the cradle” of British racing (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1915:6). Racers generally attributed this to the growth of industry (Ditcher, 1991). “With the development of industry on Tyneside, in the Potteries, in Yorkshire, on the Clyde, and in South Wales”, *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1915:6) explained, “came a further development of the sport...Wherever you find a high standard of wages and a strong combination of labour there you will also find a large army of pigeon fanciers”. The reference to ‘combination’ suggests that this particular kind of working class was motivated by strong traditions of labour organisation and trade unions, who sought a similar level of organisation, equality, and reform in their leisure.

Whilst it is not possible from the sources used to accurately map the distribution of racing pigeon clubs, it is, nonetheless, useful to have an illustrative example. A sample was accumulated from race adverts and reports in *The Racing Pigeon* held during one month at the height of the racing season (June) for five years in ten-year intervals. The sheer volume of clubs (fig. 6.19) holding races during this month meant that a map of individual clubs – located in areas ranging from small villages to large market towns (Appendix 8) – would have been incoherent. Indeed, one regular contributor to *The Racing Pigeon* in 1908 believed there were “too many clubs”, some areas boasting an “extraordinary number” of “superfluous societies” within close proximity with fewer than 15 members, subsequently suffering from annual deficits (*RP*, 1908 (20(954):6)).

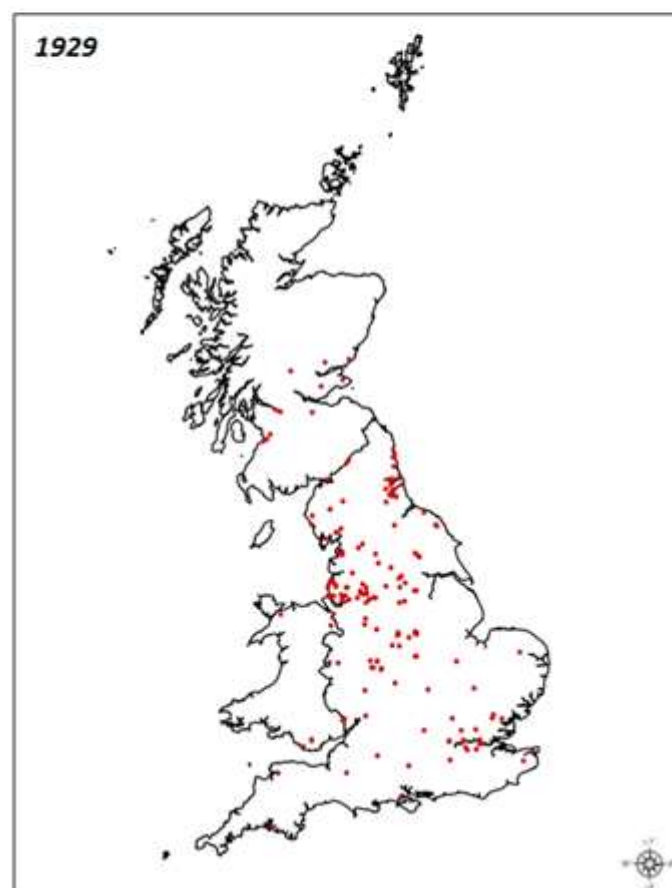
Month, year	No. club races advertised/reported
June, 1899	427
June, 1909	811
June, 1919	516
June, 1929	1,631
June, 1939	1,225

Figure 6.19: Survey of clubs advertising and reporting races, June 1899-1939

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899-1939

The maps in figure 6.20, instead, show the locations of federations and combines (Appendix 9), each point on the map, then, representing *multiple* clubs. It is, of course, to be expected that not all races appeared in *The Racing Pigeon*. The sample, nonetheless, illustrates the sport's general geographical spread (fig. 6.20), suggesting an expansion of federations and combines both spatially and numerically between 1899 and 1929 (taking into account a temporary decline post-World War One). In 1899, the sample suggests that pigeon racing was concentrated in Lancashire and Northumberland. By 1909 and 1919, however, the pastime appears to have also spread into the Midlands, south-east England, and Scotland. By 1929, the number of federations and combines in the sample had increased almost nine-fold since 1899, the geographical post-war spread widening further to incorporate southern and eastern counties and southern Wales. This geographical expansion may have been due to Britain's interwar economic geography, uneven spatial and economic development causing the migration of workers from old industrial areas in the north to the south, east, and Midlands (Culpin, 1987; Ward, 1988). The sample mapped, then, echoes Johnes' (2007) suggestion that the sport, whilst popular in northern counties, had a much wider geographical reach. Equally, however, interwar migration and urban sprawl meant that the population was more geographically dispersed, which may have contributed to the 57% decline in the sample between 1929 and 1939, the sport requiring a high concentration of people within small geographical areas. Other research has attributed the sport's decline to additional features of British interwar economic geography, including economic depression and stagnation, unemployment in heavy industries, new alternative forms of leisure, and strict council house tenancies (Mass Observation, 1943; Mott, 1973).





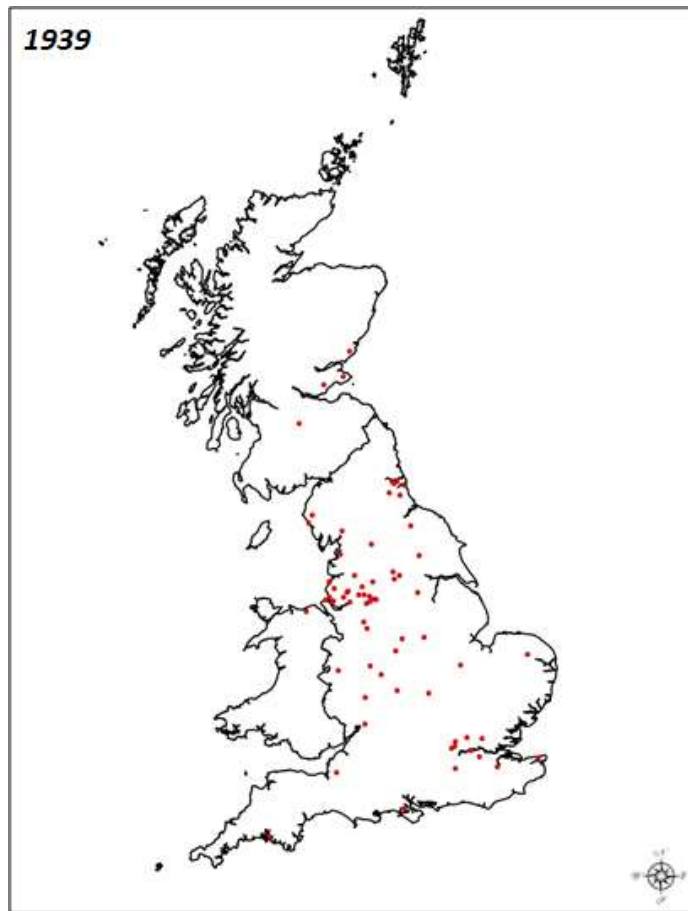


Figure 6.20: Maps showing the location of federations and combines holding races during the height of the season (June), 1899-1939

(omitted from the map are Dublin Federation, Mid-Ulster Federation, Ulster Federation, and Ulster Combine, the only examples in the sample located across the Irish Sea)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899-1939

The geographies of individual clubs were carefully mapped out, most clubs restricting their membership to within a geographical radius. Since birds returned to their own lofts, Logan explained, “the ideal of pigeon flying...[was] to fly into one limited centre”, thus eliminating as far as possible geographical influences such as weather and topography (*RP*, 1902 (9(399):318)). Racers, therefore, believed that competitions were ‘fairer’ between those living closer together, birds racing under similar conditions. Likewise, federations had small radii, for “equalisation of competition” (Squills, 1912:12). Thus, clubs and federations were almost like Latourian ‘centres of calculation’: they organised and regulated races, acting as centres of knowledge production. These accumulations of knowledge and resources were circulated between racers within clubs and federations – nationwide and internationally – thus mimicking the circulatory movement of birds from loft to race to loft. Clubs and federations, therefore, formed knowledge centres that configured the sport. Adverts in *The Racing Pigeon* for clubs and their races regularly contained maps defining the spatial boundary of club territories. In 1905, for instance, Logan’s newly-formed Harborough and District South Road F.C. published a map defining its radius, its geographical centre – and headquarters – at Market Harborough (fig. 6.21). The geographical boundaries of clubs, however, were mutable. Indeed, an advert for Logan’s club in 1911 showed that its radius had been modified (fig. 6.21), Leicester now almost at the centre and the northern boundary extended to Nottingham.

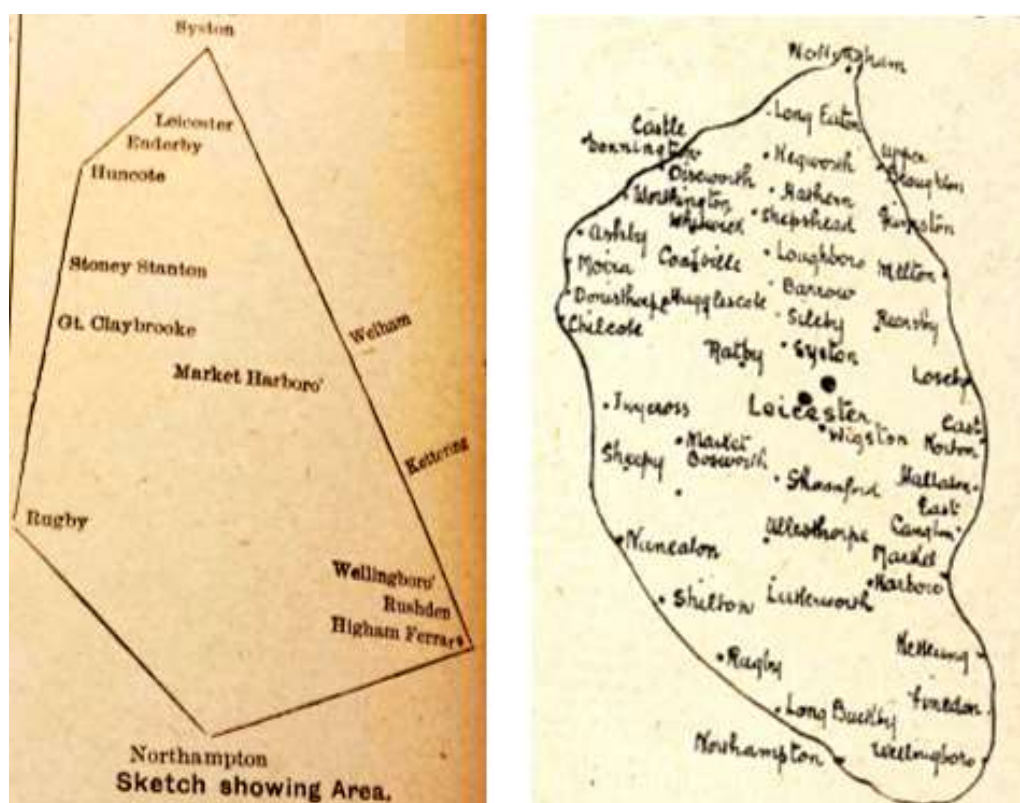


Figure 6.21: The boundaries of the Harborough and District South Road F.C., 1905 (left) and 1911 (right)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1905 (15(739):922); 1911 (26(1273):i)

6.3.1 The National Flying Club (est. 1897)

Competition was also arranged on a national scale, larger clubs organising national races usually from *international* race points across the Channel. Whilst cross-Channel races had reportedly been arranged as an “experiment” by London Columbarian Society (est. 1875) from as early as 1881 (*FW*, 1898 (18(446):34)), racers pinpointed 1894 as a ‘turning point’. That year, the first national open race was organised by John Logan and the Manchester Flying Club (est. 1883), one of the largest British clubs, reputedly of “world-wide reputation” (*RP*, 1905 (15(740):931)). The race, modelled on the successful Belgian Grand National, was open to members and non-members nationwide – 384 racers entering 610 birds – and was flown from La Rochelle (Logan, 1924). The Manchester F.C.’s annual ‘Great Northern’ open race, which later flew from Marennes, was one of “the greatest events of the year” (*FW*, 1925 (72(1879):923)) and, racers agreed, laid the foundations for the formation of a national club. It also laid the foundations for the increasingly international character of British long-distance pigeon racing.

In 1897, the National Flying Club (NFC) was formed at a meeting at Logan's loft: "Osman, as representing London and the South, Messrs. John Wright and George Yates, of Manchester, as representing the North, and Mr. J.W. Logan, as representing the Midlands" (Logan, 1924:59). The Club was associated with some of the most influential names in pigeon racing (fig. 6.22). Mr Logan became the NFC's first President, assisted by Mr Romer as Vice-President and Alfred Osman as Secretary. The Club also had Royal connections the Duke of York (later King George V) taking over as President (with Logan as Vice-President until his death) from 1899 until the mid-1920s, when his role changed to 'Patron'. In 1899, the Duke of York took fourth prize in the NFC's Lerwick race, whilst his father the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) took first and third. NFC Members had to be elected, and meetings and annual dinners took place in hotels – as opposed to the public houses – thus distinguishing the NFC from local clubs. The meetings moved around the country, but were, it seems, mainly located in London (St Pancras), Derby, and Birmingham, near to railway stations to facilitate racers travelling nationwide. *The Racing Pigeon* became "the official organ of the club", publishing results and committee meeting reports, and generally promoting the Club (*RP*, 1922 (41(2096):847)).



Figure 6.22: The NFC Committee, 1898
 Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(12):196)

The NFC was formed with the “purpose of promoting one long distance race open to all England, with the assured belief that such a race would tend to improve the breed of our racing pigeons” (Logan, 1924:60). The race thus formed in 1898 was known as the Grand National, dubbed the “Blue Riband of the sport”, and was open to members and non-members (*RP*, 1911 (27(1325):113)). The Grand National was the Club’s main annual event, flown from a Continental race point,

but the NFC also organised occasional races from Lerwick in Scotland and a series of 'young bird' races each year from inland locations. The NFC encompassed England and Wales; Scotland and Ireland, due to their distance from race points in France and Spain, had their own national clubs and races.

The race-day arrangements for the Grand National were the same as any club race, but on a much larger scale. Before the birds were transported to their liberation point, they were taken to designated 'marking stations' – or the clubhouse for local clubs – where elected committee members would oversee the 'marking' of birds (fig. 6. 23). During 'marking', race sheets were filled in detailing each bird's ring number – allocated from birth – as well as wing stamp (if used by clubs), year of birth, colour, and sex. Either by hand or machine (fig. 6.24), birds were then rung with a uniquely-numbered rubber race ring, the number noted on the race sheet to keep a record of participants and prove ownership of birds. The NFC issued rubber race rings costing 6d. each, the price increasing to 1s. by 1920. Birds were then placed into baskets, sealed with a lead seal, and sent to their liberation point.



Figure 6.23: The NFC Committee "marking the birds for the race", 1898

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(12):197)



Figure 6.24: Ringing device, 1931

Source: Ogdens (1931) *Racing Pigeons*, No.33

The NFC's annual subscription was set at 10s. 6d., increasing to £1 1s. in the early 1920s. Race entry fees began at 5s. per bird, doubling after World War One. This relatively expensive fee, coupled with the high risk of losing birds in cross-Channel races, meant racers usually only entered one or two birds. For most clubs, entry fees could be used to increase entries, but for the NFC, entry fees controlled the quality of entries and prestige of the event, one Committee member stating that he "would sooner see a few good birds go to the National than so much rubbish" (*RP*, 1902 (9(415):555)). The Grand National race could be very lucrative. The first winner, in 1898, won £147 12s. in total, winning first prize, a special cup, and money in the pools. The top three prizes were set at £20, £10, and £5, and, by the 1930s, there were four main prizes – £40, £25, £15, and £10 – and fifty smaller prizes. In the optional pools, racers entered their birds for either the 2s. 6d., 5s., 10s., or £1 pool, some of the most successful racers winning over £20 per race. The NFC believed that "good prize money induces keener competition" (*RP*, 1902 (9(414):540)), although others were wary that higher stakes provided more incentive for racers to cheat (see Section 6.7).

Whilst membership figures were rarely published in *The Racing Pigeon*, by 1905, the NFC had 1,036 members. Arguably more important, however, were Grand National *entry numbers*, given that the race was also open to non-members. From the sampled years of the paper, entries appear to have fluctuated, increasing steadily until a severe decrease in 1908 (fig. 6.25). Racers gave no clues explaining this decrease, although this was the first season that NFC members, in order to compete, also had to pay membership to the National Homing Union, a body which, as will be explained, had both advocates and adversaries. From then,

entries never regained their previous heights, and continued to fluctuate. Racers explained that entries depended on the previous races that season, earlier disastrous losses – often due to bad weather – discouraging Grand National entries.

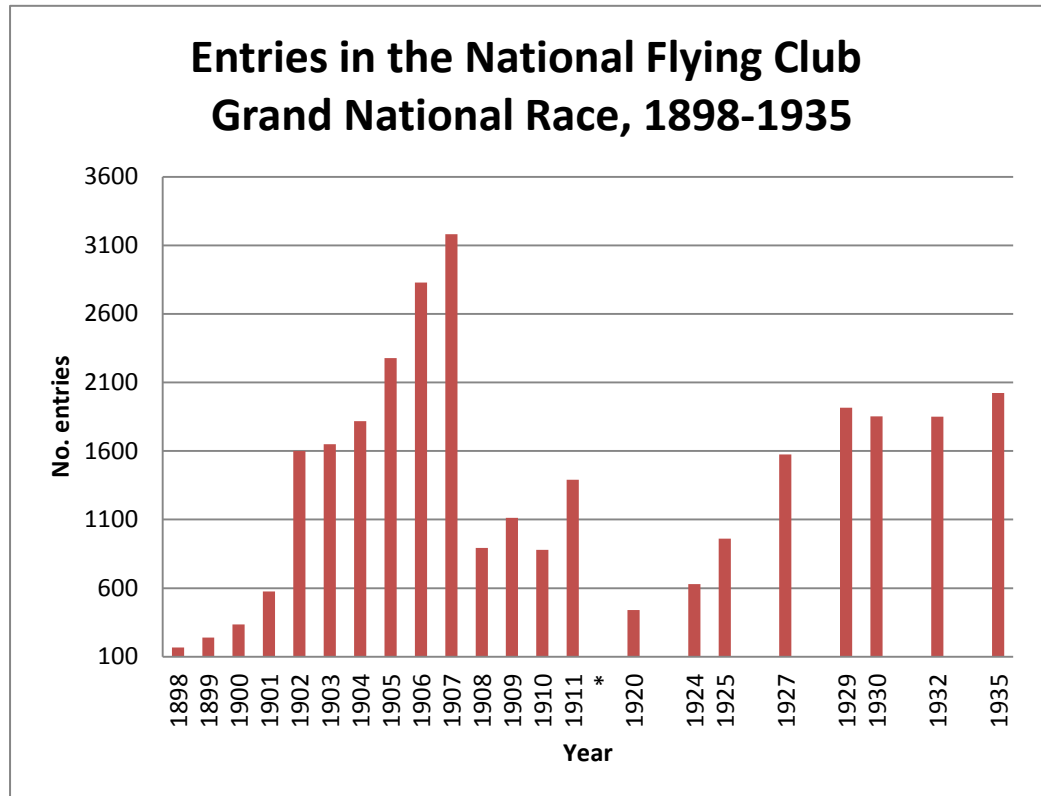


Figure 6.25: Grand National Race entries, 1898-1935

*racing ceased during World War One, cross-Channel races recommencing in 1920

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898-1935

Another possible explanation for fluctuations in entries was changes to the race point chosen by the NFC, the location of which caused constant debate. The location of the Grand National, racers believed, needed to reflect the race’s prestigious reputation as “the longest distance race” in Britain, whilst keeping it a fair and truly national event (*RP*, 1908 (21(1023):334)). However, Logan explained, “a race in which birds from Lancashire and birds from London are set to compete one against the other, never can...be a real trial of strength on equal terms and conditions”, birds flying to lofts “widely scattered over the country” (*RP*, 1902 (9(397):285)). Logan (1924) illustrated this in the second edition of his *Pigeon Racer’s Handbook*, two maps (fig. 6.26) showing the locations of entries in the 1907 Grand National from Marennes and the locations of the first 260 arrivals, both of which showed a western bias (similar to the trends shown in figure 6.20). This correlation, for Logan (1924:33), was due to what he termed

‘drag’ – the tendency of birds to be influenced by the direction in which the majority of birds were flying, the minority pulled off-course – causing racers from areas with smaller entries “almost insurmountable difficulties”.

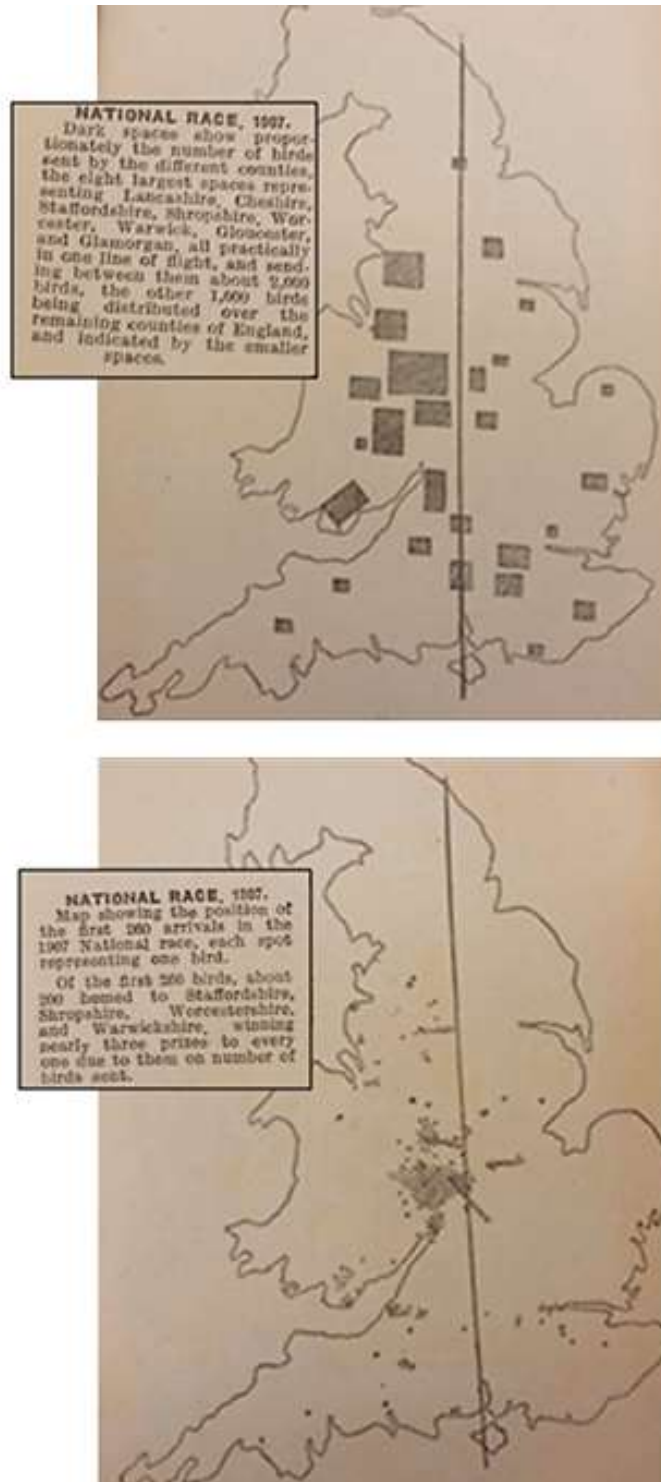


Figure 6.26: Locations of entries to the 1907 NFC Grand National (top) and locations of the first 260 arrivals (bottom)

Source: Logan (1924:61, 62)

The first Grand National race was flown from Bordeaux. *The Racing Pigeon* explained: “if the race was flown from Nantes or Rennes...it would give those fanciers in the South of England an undue advantage” (*RP*, 1899 (3(71):43)). Bordeaux was, however, reportedly a “most difficult race” (*RP*, 1899 (3(71):43)), racers calling it a “funeral procession” or “wholesale slaughter” due to the low rate of return (fig. 6.27) (*RP*, 1902 (9(406):431)). The ‘success’ of races was predominantly measured by the number of birds returning either on the same day as the liberation or by the end of the next day. However, “the fact must not be lost sight of”, Osman stated, “that the National race ought to be an arduous one” (*RP*, 1898 (1(12):194)). Thus, racers relished the challenge, one racer explaining: “that which it is difficult to obtain is valued the most highly” (*RP*, 1899 (3(71):43)). The difficulty of the race, then, gave it added prestige, bolstering racers’ achievements.

Year	Birds sent	Returned by end of 2 nd day	%
1898	166	6	3.61%
1899	240	14	5.83%
1900	336	124	36.90%
1901	576	38	6.60%
1902	1601	32	2.00%

Figure 6.27: Proportion of birds finishing the Grand National from Bordeaux within two days

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1902 (9(414):539)

One of the main factors that made Bordeaux challenging was its distance from the Channel, birds already tired before reaching the water. The Channel was, itself, demanding “with its ever-changeable and generally strong currents, wind, and its frequent fogs” (*RP*, 1902 (9(397):285)). Logan suggested that a race point in France closer to the Channel would be preferable, although for some these were “rather too near”, racers worrying that shortening the distance of the race would affect its reputation (*RP*, 1902 (9(414):539)). Others suggested changing the race *direction*, advocating liberation points in Scotland, such as the Club’s already tried and tested Lerwick race. In Continental races, birds flew ‘south road’ – a term universally used by racers to describe northward flying (north-east, north-west, or due-north) – whilst races flown southwards were described as ‘north road’ (there were no races directly east or west, presumably due to the short distance across the width of Britain). Pigeon racers never explained the origin of these

terms, although Mott (1973) suggests that they denoted the direction in which the birds were taken for liberation.

British pigeon racing, then, had strong international links. Over the first forty years of the Grand National's history, its location moved around France and Spain (fig. 6.28), each race point met by both support and opposition. Much to racers' dismay, a truly fair national race was, as one racer summarised, "an utter impracticability" (*RP*, 1902 (9(401):350)). As a resolution, Logan suggested having multiple National races, the NFC undertaking this from 1912 to 1914. In 1914, the Club experimented with three races held on the same day from Bordeaux, Marennes, and Pons, birds entering the race that most suited their loft location.

Year	National Race Continental race point
1898-1902	Bordeaux
1903	La Roche
1904-1907	Marennes
1908-1910	Mirande
1911	Bordeaux
1912	Dax; Bordeaux
1913	Rennes; Nantes; Bordeaux
1914	Rennes; Bordeaux/Marennes/Pons
<i>Racing stopped during World War One</i>	
1920	Bordeaux
1921-1938	San Sebastian

Figure 6.28: Location of the NFC's Continental races, 1898-1939

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898-1939

In an attempt to "make competition as equal as possible", the NFC – and, indeed, some other clubs and federations with large radii – split their competitions into 'sections' (*RP*, 1939 (69(2949):248)). The 1914 Grand National, flown from three different locations, saw the country split into seven sections, originally proposed by Logan (fig. 6.29). Birds in Sections A, B, and C flew from Marennes; Sections D and E flew from Pons; and Sections F and G flew from Bordeaux. Logan's map also showed the numbers of birds entered into the 1913 race by county, a large concentration found in the north-east and north-west. Whilst in subsequent years the race reverted to a single location, prizes and pools were still split by these sections. There were, therefore, inherently geographical questions involved in organising national races.

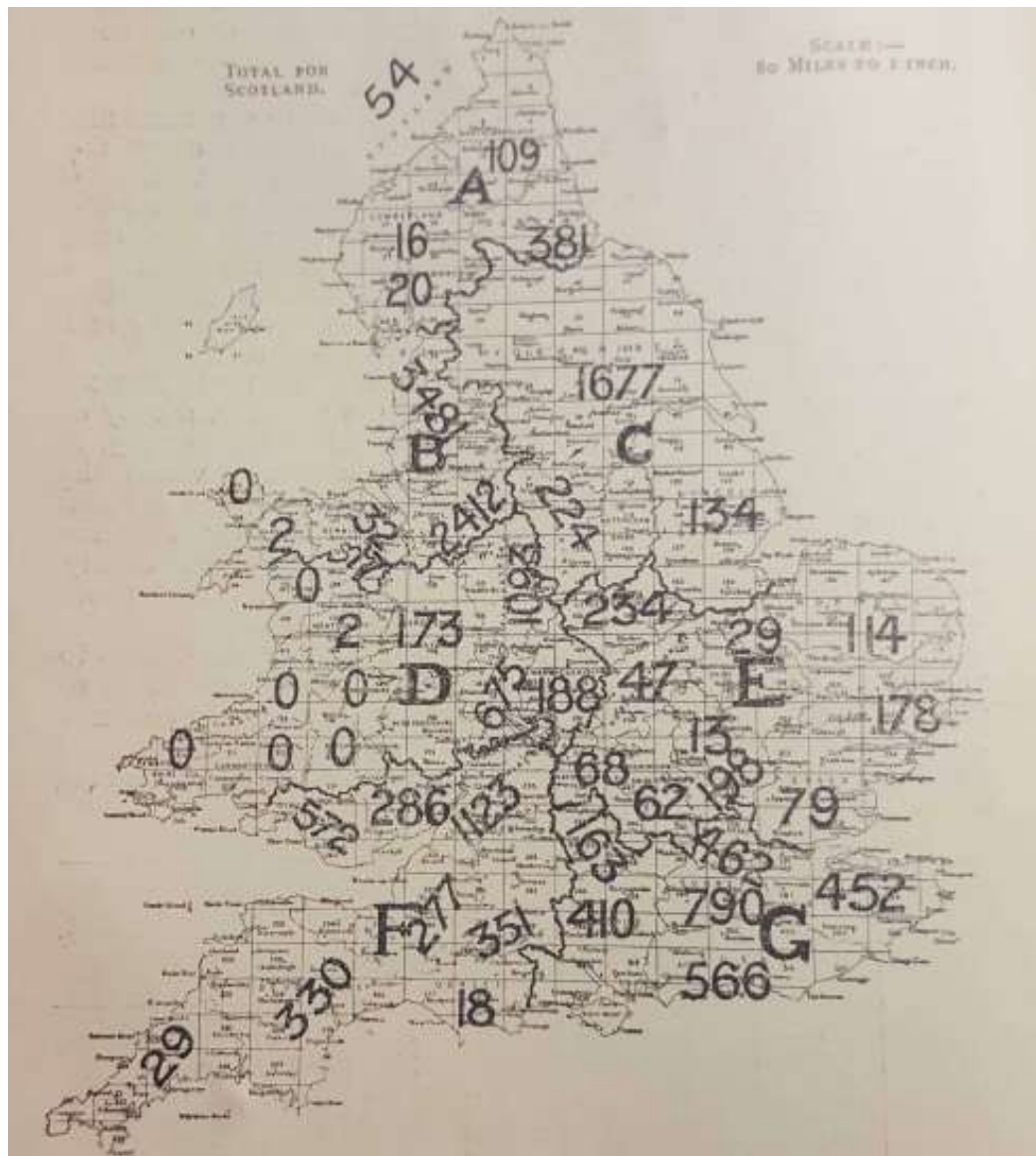


Figure 6.29: "Copy of map used by Mr. Logan at the N.F. Club Annual Meeting, 1913, when proposing the new departure for season 1914" (figures show 1913 entries by county)

Source: *Squills Diary* (1915:16)

6.4 The National Homing Union (est. 1896)

As the sport of long-distance pigeon racing grew, racers began to discuss ways to formally organise and standardise the increasingly competitive sport. At a meeting in Leeds in 1896, the National Homing Union (NHU) was established as a national governing body, with the aim of promoting "unanimity and good feeling, and act as a judicial body" (RP, 1905 (14(644):39)). It was formed to oversee the conduct of races and treatment of racing pigeons, seeking uniformity and

precision in order to ensure fair-play. Its objectives were five-fold, each providing key themes that make up this and the following chapter (fig. 6.30).

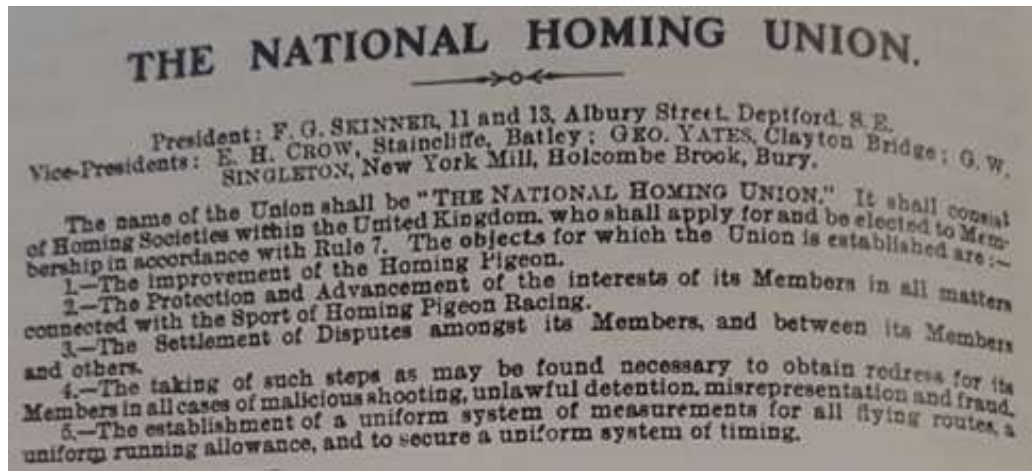


Figure 6.30: NHU objectives, 1905

Source: *Squills Diary*, 1905 (pp62 in R. Osman, 1997)

The Union's first meeting was held in 1897 in Manchester, later moving to locations in Derby, Bristol, York, and Birmingham. A Council was elected – including a president, two vice presidents, and a secretary – and Mr Logan was elected as the body's first President. There were also sub-committees dealing with the various logistical aspects of racing discussed in this chapter, such as transport, weather, and timing. The committees and the NHU Council held regular meetings, conferences, and social dinners (fig. 6.31).



Figure 6.31: "Banquet at the Grand Hotel Birmingham in connection with the National Homing Union Conference, Nov. 30th, 1912"

Source: *Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1913:167

Annual subscription for Union membership, from 1896 to 1939, was 2s. 6d., except for a temporary post-war decrease (1s.) to revitalise the sport. Clubs paid 1s. per member for club affiliation to the Union, allowing them to sell Union rings to their members, make profits to be used as prize money, and organise popular and esteemed Union-affiliated races. *The Racing Pigeon* did not publish NHU membership annually, but figures published in the sampled years suggest a steadily-increasing membership throughout its first thirty years (fig. 6.32). It was, however, difficult for the NHU to calculate its membership figures, racers paying a subscription for each club of which they were a member. At the end of the nineteenth century, Osman argued, “not one fifth of the fanciers in this country belong[ed] to the Union” (*RP*, 1899 (2(55):278)), estimating in 1927 that there were “400,000 fanciers outside the Union” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2304):2)). Despite this, the NHU claimed to be “the central body to which the majority of clubs are affiliated” (*RP*, 1902 (8(328):12)).

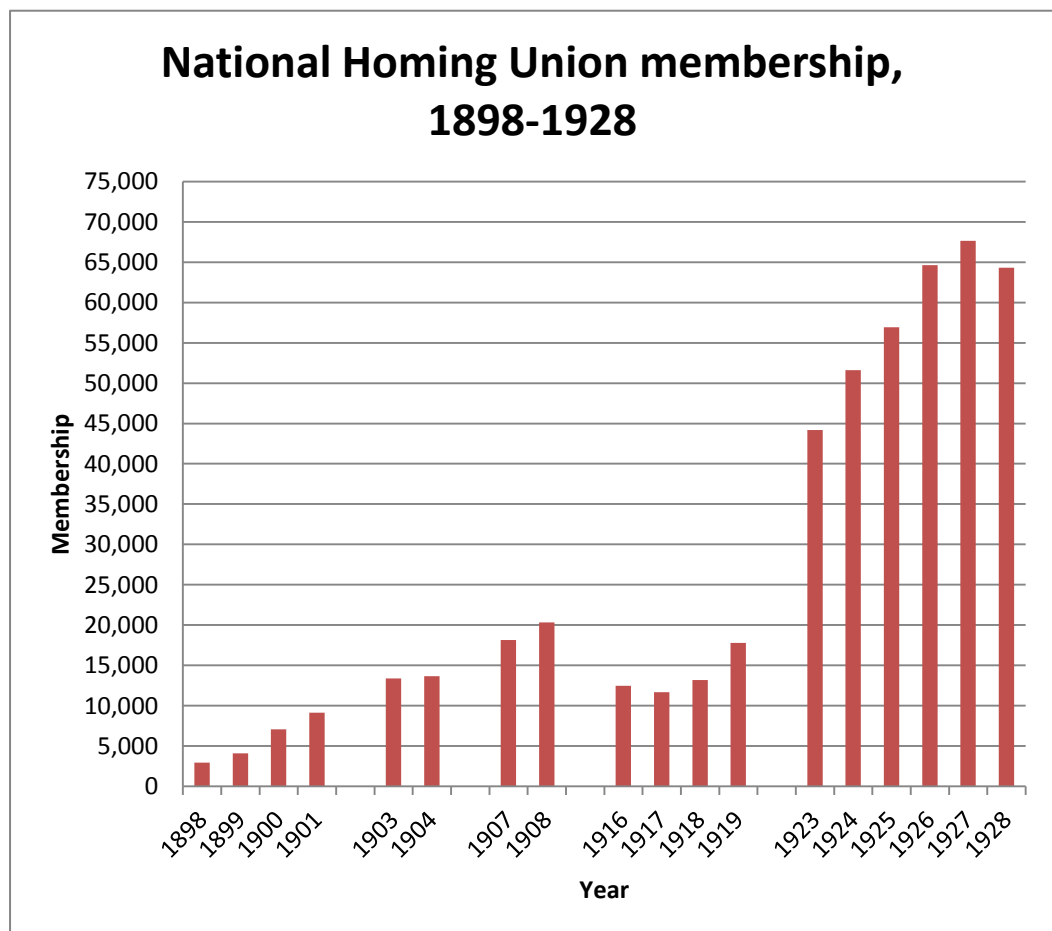


Figure 6.32: NHU membership, 1898-1928

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898-1928

One of the NHU's main undertakings was the production of racing pigeon rings. All racing pigeons – when only one week old – were permanently rung with numbered metal rings “for the purpose of identifying the birds” (*RP*, 1902 (8(328):12)). “By means of these metal rings”, Osman explained, “the ownership of a bird can be traced”, the unique engraved numbers also helping racers keep stud records (*RP*, 1902 (8(328):12)). Rings were, therefore, a means of identification for birds, an expression of ownership, a method control, and a form of “protection against fraud” (*RP*, 1904 (12(584):234)). Rings also, however, ensured that birds were eligible for prizes, not only from race organisers, but also prizes offered by ring distributors. Aside from the NHU, a range of bodies issued rings, including pigeon papers such as *The Racing Pigeon* (fig. 6.33), appliance companies, and individual clubs. Once rung, birds kept their rings for life, but could wear multiple rings, allowing them to compete in races organised by different bodies. There was, in fact, a confusing abundance of different rings available, which W.H. Osman condemned as “the taint of commercialism” (*RP*, 1933 (57(2637):260)).



Figure 6.33: Advert for race rings sold by ‘The Racing Pigeon’, 1935

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1935 (61(2742):260)

In order to compete in Union-affiliated races, birds had to be rung – from birth – with metal Union rings, bearing the initials ‘N.U.’, costing 2d. each. From 1905, however, the NHU ruled that birds competing in Union races were to wear *only* the Union ring, excluding them from competing in races requiring alternative rings. This move reportedly encouraged some racers to leave the Union, accusing it of dictatorship. “The ring question”, as it was termed by one racer, was recurrently debated in the pages of *The Racing Pigeon*, racers arguing about the price and terms of using the rings (*RP*, 1933 (57(2637):260)). Union ring sales were not always published in the paper, but those in the sampled years show a steady increase at the outset (fig. 6.34). By the 1920s, however, ring sales more than halved – despite membership growing – Union rings becoming a “comparative non-entity” compared to the range of alternative rings (*RP*, 1927 (46(2304):2)). This is evident upon calculating the average number of Union rings purchased per member, which fell from more than 20 in the Union’s early years to only 1-2 in the late-1920s (fig. 6.35). Whilst the NHU sold more rings than its fancy counterpart – on average 1.6 times as many between 1925 and 1927 – it was, nonetheless, not as representative as it claimed and strived to be.

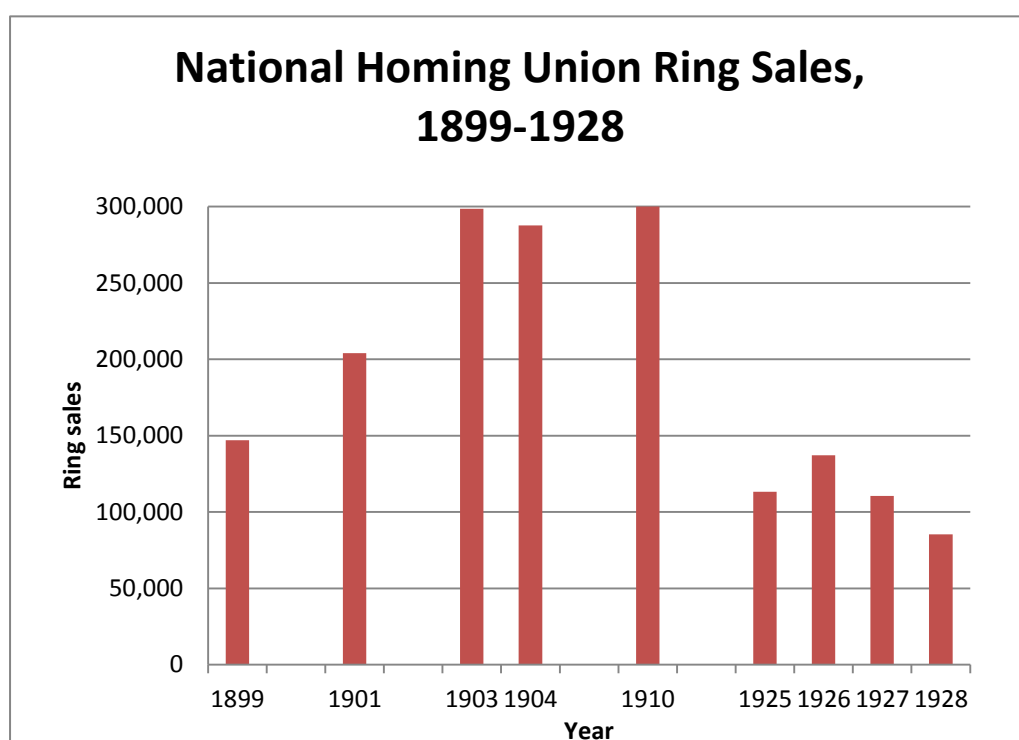


Figure 6.34: NHU ring sales, 1899-1928
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899-1928

Year	Membership	Ring sales	Average no. rings per member
1899	4,096	147,000	35.89
1901	9,124	204,000	22.36
1903	13,376	298,640	22.33
1904	13,667	287,650	21.05
1925	56,940	113,191	1.99
1926	64,648	137,100	2.12
1927	67,631	110,456	1.63
1928	64,305	83,305	1.30

Figure 6.35: Average rings per NHU member, 1899-1904

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899-1904

6.4.1 Splitting the Country

Due to the nationwide spread of pigeon racers, the NHU devised “a scheme for the division of the country”, splitting itself into Local Centres with elected Committees to ease organisation (*RP*, 1902 (8(344):297)). Each Centre had the power to make local decisions and had equal representation at national meetings. In 1899, *The Racing Pigeon* reproduced in colour – rare at this time – a pull-out map published by the NHU, showing eight Local Centres (fig. 6.36). Their geographies were, however, mutable, new Centres forming where there was demand, and old ones fluctuating in size due to clubs changing Centres.



Figure 6.36: The NHU's 8 regional centres in 1899; Northern (Yellow), North Western (Red), Yorkshire (Brown), Western (Green), West Midlands (Grey), East Midlands (Blue), South Western (Yellow), and London (Pink)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899 (2(41):supplement)

The Union's balance sheet for the end of 1901 gave the breakdown of subscriptions, from which can be inferred the relative populations of each Centre (fig. 6.37). It shows the North-Western Centre to have the largest population of pigeon racers, followed by London and Yorkshire; the newly-formed North-East Lancashire Centre contributed the lowest amount of subscriptions, possibly due to its narrower geographical radius.

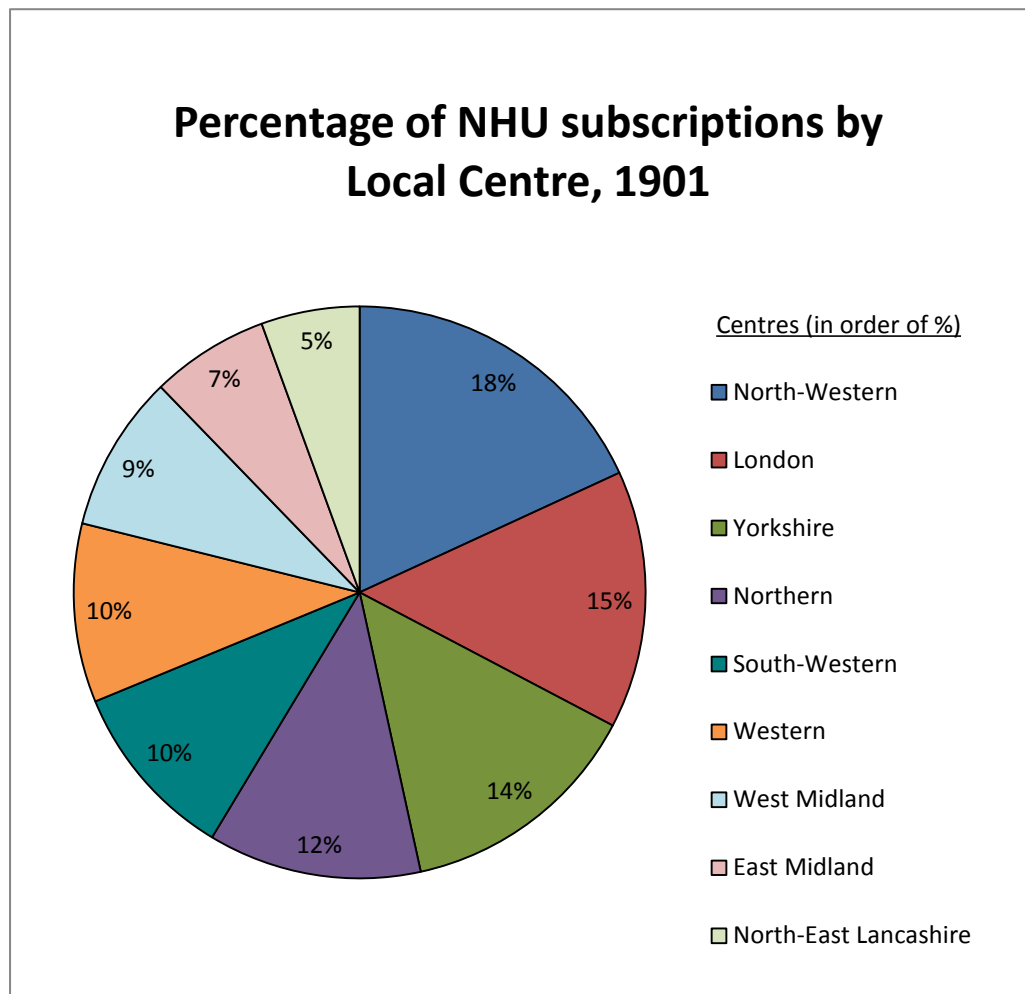


Figure 6.37: NHU subscriptions by Local Centre, 1901

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1902 (8(336):158)

By 1920, four new Centres had been created (fig. 6.38). The proportions of total NHU subscriptions raised by each Centre suggest a geographical shift in concentrations of pigeon racers (corresponding with figure 6.20). The West Midland Centre now had the largest population of pigeon racers, followed by the London and South-Western Centres. The North-East Lancashire Centre, again, had the smallest population, along with the newly formed North-Western Counties Centre and the Westmorland and Cumberland Centre. Whilst the

geographical boundaries of these Centres were not properly outlined in *The Racing Pigeon*, the increase in the number of northern Centres, it can be assumed, would have caused them to shrink in size geographically, perhaps explaining their low contributions to NHU subscriptions. Nonetheless, despite seven of the Centres now covering northern parts of England, their combined contribution to NHU subscriptions had reduced from nearly 50% in 1901 to 41% in 1920. Whilst the Scottish Centre was the smallest – contributing only 0.23% of subscriptions – there was an alternative Scottish Homing Union (est.1907), its 235 founding clubs split into twenty-three Centres (Brooks, 2007).

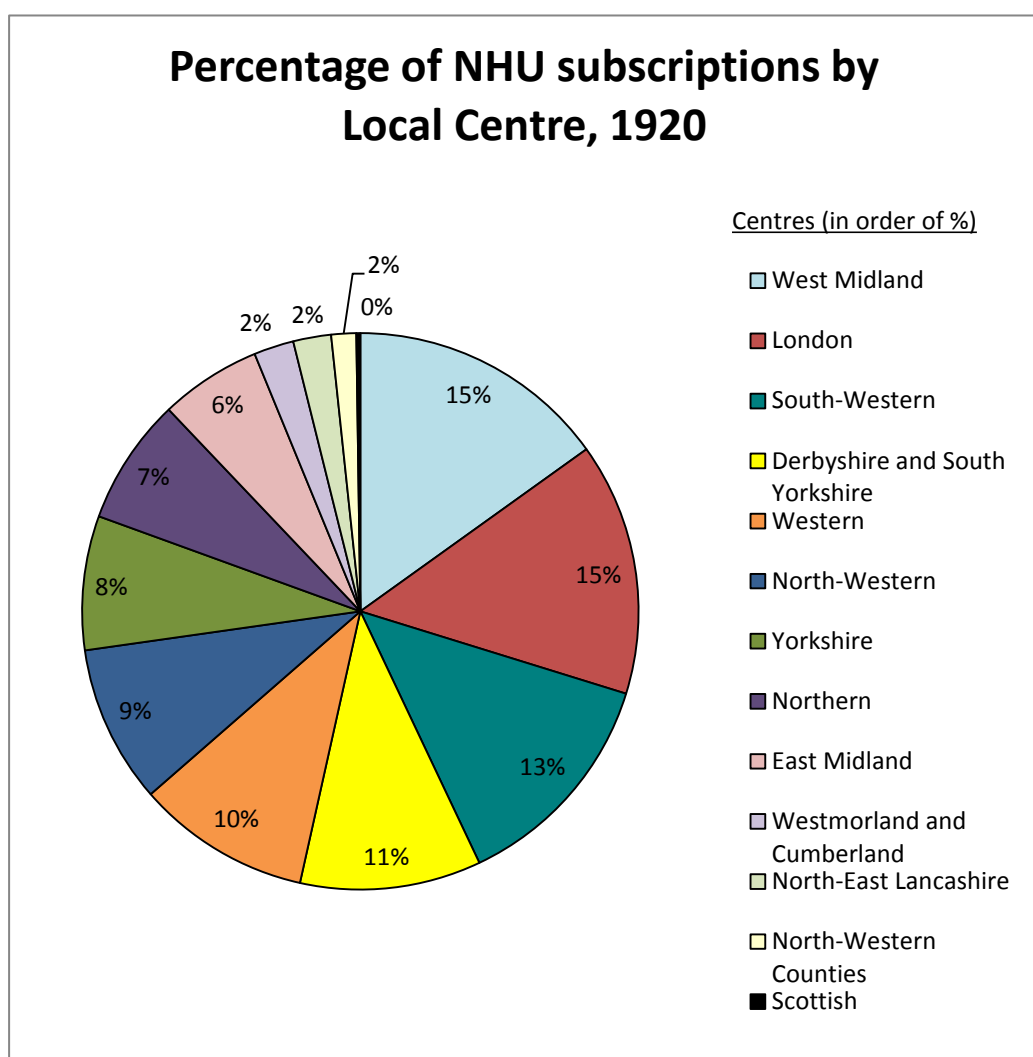


Figure 6.38: NHU subscriptions by Local Centre, 1920

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1920 (39(1953):227)

As well as the Union splitting the country administratively, it also caused its members to ‘split’ based on their opinions. In 1919 the Secretary of the Northern Centre wrote that some north-eastern clubs had split from the NHU – explaining

the trend shown in figure 6.38 – forming a new Union “to be called “The North of England Homing Union”” (NEHU) (*RP*, 1919 (38(1940):628)). Led by the large, well-known – and somewhat proudly-named – Up North Combine, this threatened the NHU’s power due to the large concentration of racers in the north-east. The new NEHU was based in Newcastle-on-Tyne, offering cheaper subscription (2s.) and rings (1d. each). It had about 10% of the membership of the NHU, but sold 20% of the rings. Some racers in the north-east, however, boycotted the new body, appealing for solidarity towards the NHU. Osman worried that the formation of the new Union would lead to “little Homing Unions springing up...chaos will result” (*RP*, 1920 (39(1951):179)). His son, a decade later, still warned that one single union was “best in the interest of the sport”, in order to maintain “control” and “unity” (*RP*, 1932 (56(2604):261)).

Despite defending the NHU, Osman admitted that its “chief objects seem[ed] to have been forgotten” (*RP*, 1923 (42(2110):224)). The NHU Council had, he claimed, “become imbued with the idea that we want more and more rules”, instead of reducing rail rates or guarding pigeon welfare (*RP*, 1923 (42(2110):224)). Animal welfare had a relatively high public profile at the time, the Humanitarian League (1891-1919) generating wider public sensibility about cruelty towards both humans and animals. Around half of the prosecution cases that the Union dealt with each year were against people shooting racing pigeons, or trapping them and selling them – either to racers or for shooting matches – although racers criticised the NHU for not eliminating such cruelty. Furthermore, the NHU was unsuccessful in lobbying for the removal of Peregrines from the Wild Birds’ Protection Act, predators posing another threat to pigeon welfare. The Union worked with the RSPCA, but was criticised for the lack of Parliamentary legislation protecting racing pigeons.

In addition, the NHU was frequently criticised by racers for reportedly not making decisions democratically. Appearing to struggle to cope with increasing demands for control and standardisation, the NHU became unrepresentative of both pigeon racers and, perhaps, the sport itself. Amongst some of the major concerns that pigeon racers had were logistical questions in regulating the sport, racers appealing for improved transport arrangements, resolution of irregularities in timing races, and the provision of accurate loft locations and flying measurements. It is these organisational issues – and the inherently

geographical questions with which they engaged – that the rest of this chapter will examine.

6.5 ‘Pigeon Traffic’

Racing pigeons travelled to races in baskets or panniers (fig. 6.39), spaces which were much-contested. Regular columns in *The Racing Pigeon* frequently advised racers to buy good quality baskets and clean them regularly, adding that birds needed to be ‘basket trained’ to stop them becoming “wild, [and] restless” during journeys (*RP*, 1914 (32(1597):220)). The price of baskets began at around 10s., the expense causing some racers to choose cheaper, poor-quality options. Logan appealed – albeit unsuccessfully – for standardisation, advocating “fixing upon a suitable basket, which...our basket-makers would gladly adopt for their standard” (*RP*, 1905 (14(691):872)). From the early-twentieth century, pigeon exhibitions incorporated shows of appliances and baskets, medals awarded to the best examples. Nonetheless, the NHU reported that basket manufacturers often quoted double the Union’s ‘safe’ recommendation of 20 birds per basket. The conditions were described as ‘cruelty’, birds spending up to five days in small, rotting baskets, often with no provisions for food or water. Quoting Belgian racer Monsieur Delmotte, *The Racing Pigeon* wrote: “*le panier est le mort des pigeons*” (‘baskets kill pigeons’) (*RP*, 1914 (33(1633):3)). As a result, the Ministry of Agriculture and the RSPCA reportedly undertook investigations into pigeon baskets.

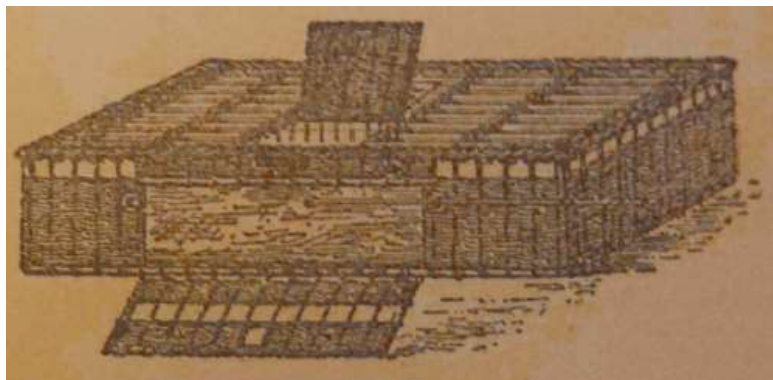


Figure 6.39: “Hamper adapted for ten birds”, 1924

Source: Logan (1924:13)

Once in their baskets, pigeons travelled to training tosses and long-distance races by train. Indeed, the close relationship between long-distance racing and the railway network in Britain is important to understanding the geographies of the sport's organisation. The transportation of racing pigeons served as an interesting cross-over between the larger network of agricultural movement via the railways and the use of railways for public leisure. Before the advent of railways, however, racing pigeons travelled "by pack-horse, in some sort of van", or, for shorter distances "on the back of a man on foot...on horse-back", or bicycle (*Squills Diary*, 1938:15). It was, perhaps, the nature of these modes of transport that meant that early pigeon racing could only take place over short distances.

Even after the rise of railways, some racers continued to use these cheaper transport methods for training tosses (fig. 6.40). For training, birds were "taken day after day to gradually increasing distances from home, and then liberated" (Tegetmeier, 1867:276). This began in March or April, each racer having their own regimes. One racer, for instance, in 1899, suggested that untrained birds should start at three miles, working up to fifteen. The next three training stages, he claimed, were used for all his birds, twenty-five, sixty, seventy-five, and one hundred miles, although the older birds, he recommended, "must not be tired by too many tosses" (*RP*, 1899 (2(47):147)). The distances that birds raced depended on their age – and, therefore, experience – one racer suggesting that yearlings should fly up to 200 miles and only birds over 4-years-old should fly further than 400 miles.



Figure 6.40: "Mr Dobson and the method by which he trains his pigeons", 1908
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1908 (21(1008):74)

During World War One, rail restrictions meant that cars or vans were sometimes used by clubs. The Great Western Railway's (GWR) magazine explained that, post-war, the railways were "faced with the competition of the road man", because birds could be liberated "well away from such obstacles as wires, which are ever-present on the railway" (*GWR*, 1932, (44(5):191)). However, racers argued that roads provided "a bad substitute for the comfort of a railway van", road journeys being bumpy and slow, thus affecting the condition of racing birds (*RP*, 1926 (45(2272):369)).

6.5.1 The Railways

British long-distance pigeon racing was arguably a direct result of the expansion of the railway network, which facilitated longer races and "the establishment of other clubs in other districts" (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1915:6). During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, railways were crucial in organising and regulating time and space, creating, as they do today, "networks of news, knowledge and social exchange extending across regions, nations, and continents" (Revill, 2012:12). As Stein (2001) explains, during the nineteenth-century, developments in transport and communications – such as railways and telegraphy – re-orientated spatial and temporal relations. Whilst no doubt most sports and pastimes were modified by the development of the railway network, connecting – and simultaneously strategically separating – disparate parts of the country, the effects on pigeon racing were enormous. Railways physically enabled the sport of long-distance racing by allowing liberations from distant places, an example of Harvey's (1989) time-space compression. Railway timetables also provided racers with a ready-made organisational structure for transporting their birds. Standardised 'Railway Time', Revill (2012:11) argues, "signified a disposition towards the modern world in which punctuality and specific rule-governed behaviour formed a cultural ideal", creating and regulating common time-space rhythms. Railways, then, helped to further organise and standardise British long-distance pigeon racing.

"From the end of March to the first week of September", the GWR's magazine wrote, "there is a continual stream of this traffic" (fig. 6.41), the number of birds increasing as training turned into competitive races (*GWR*, 1932, (44(5):191)). The geography of the railways, it seems, also affected the geography of race

locations, most liberation points located at railway stations. Birds were either liberated by a member of the railway staff or by an experienced convoyer (see Section 6.6) paid by clubs to accompany the birds. According to Osman, it was only the “minor club that sends to stationmasters” (*RP*, 1899 (3(119):704)), due to the cost of employing convoyers, advising against it as “a last extremity” (Squills, 1912:7).

The release of birds at railway stations was an “extraordinary spectacle” (fig. 6.42), large convoys liberated in batches at 15-minute intervals (*LNER*, 1927 (17(7):290)). At liberations, Tegetmeier (1867:276) described, the birds “would rise in the air...circling in gradually increasing spirals” before choosing their direction. Large liberations, however, could be dangerous, birds being “dragged out of their course”, although some racers thought this produced “gamer and more intelligent birds” (*RP*, 1905 (14(681):706)). The liberation of pigeons, then, was a drama, involving thrill, excitement, and danger. Liberations could, it seems, also cause *public* excitement. In 1898, for instance, Osman’s report of the London North Road Federation’s race from Bishop Stortford (fig. 6.43) stated that “public races of this description do much to get the sport talked about” (*RP*, 1898 (1(18):288)). The liberation, he continued, took place “in the presence of 6,000 or 7,000 people...the largest gathering that has ever witnessed a toss of homing pigeons” (*RP*, 1898 (1(18):288)). A liberation of pigeons later featured on an Ogdens (1931, No.37) cigarette card (fig. 6.44), further implying that there was a public interest in these exciting occasions.

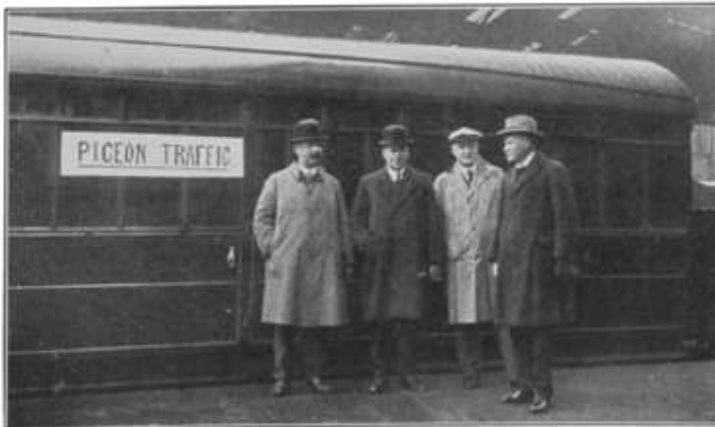


Figure 6.41: Trains for racing pigeons: "Gt. Northern Marennes Convoy", 1925: 1,444 birds belonging to the Lancashire Combine (top); "Loading Pigeons", 1929 (centre); "Mr. W.G. Johnson and Mr. F. Potts (President and Secretary of 'North Combine'), Mr P. Marshall (Canvasser) and Mr. E.F. Wilkinson (District Passenger Manager)", 1929 (bottom)

Sources: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1925 (44(231):571); *LMS Magazine*, 1929 (6(2):44); *LNER Magazine*, 1929 (19(5):257)



Figure 6.42: "A pigeon flight from Hitchin", 1929

Source: *LNER*, 1929 (19(10):556))

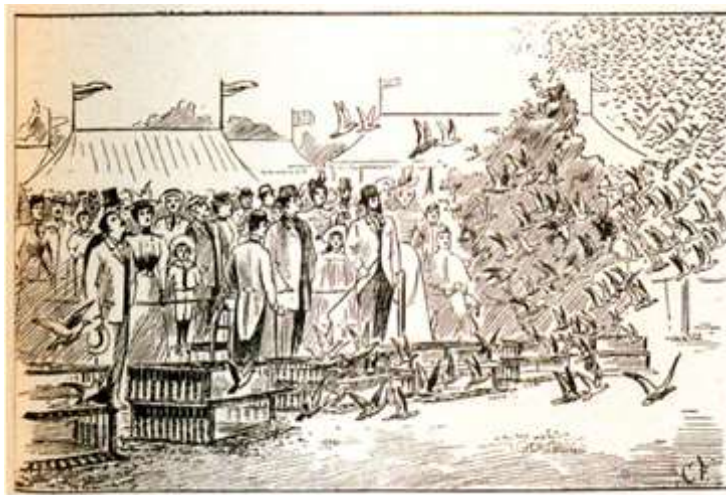


Figure 6.43: "Liberation of Birds at Bishop's Stortford", 1898

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(18):288)



Figure 6.44: "Releasing Pigeons", 1931: 17,000 pigeons belonging to the Up North Combine

Source: Ogdens (1931) *Racing Pigeons*, No.37

The NHU, *The Racing Pigeon*, and the Railway Board produced labels for baskets stating instructions for the care of racing pigeons (fig. 6.45), to be filled in and returned with the empty baskets. The train carriages most commonly used to transport pigeons were bogie brake vans (fig. 6.46), the space specially-adapted in order to accommodate pigeon baskets. One correspondent in the London, Midland and Scottish Railway Company's (LMS) magazine explained: "the whole train was connected by corridors, each vehicle was specially ventilated and lighted" (*LMS*, 1929 (6(2):44)). An Ogdens (1931, No.20) cigarette card added that the carriages were "constructed so that convoyers can walk from one end to another to examine and tend the birds". Figure 6.47, for example, shows drawings of the North Eastern Railway Company's (NER) specially-designed carriages in 1910 and 1911, with fitted shelves to carry 27 and 40 pigeon baskets respectively.

Per	train from	Station,	Railway.
PIGEONS WITH CARE.			
To be tossed at		Station.	
O	Basket to be returned to	Station.	
		Kindly state time tossed.	
To liberate, please do not handle the birds, but cut the string, and let down the falling door in front.		H. M.	
N.B.—Do not liberate if foggy or rainy and not later than .			

Figure 6.45: Mr Logan's suggestion for a railway label, 1898

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(31):501)

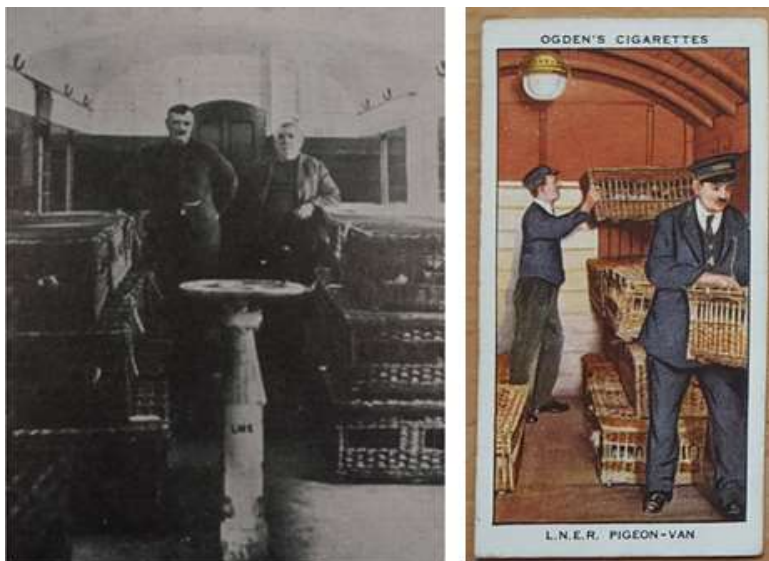


Figure 6.46: "Convoying pigeons", 1929 (left); An LNER van, 1931 (right)

Source: *LMS Magazine*, 1929 (6(2):45); Ogdens (1931) *Racing Pigeons*, No.20

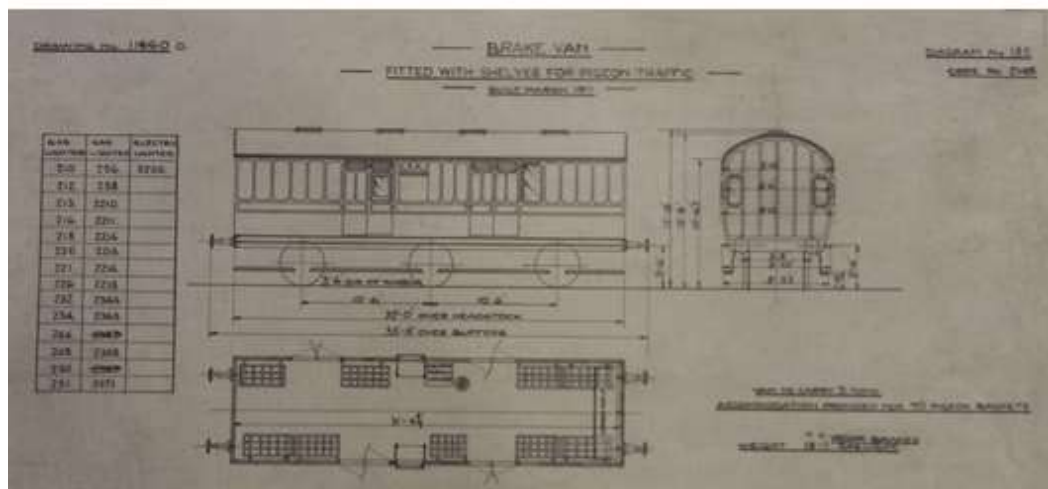
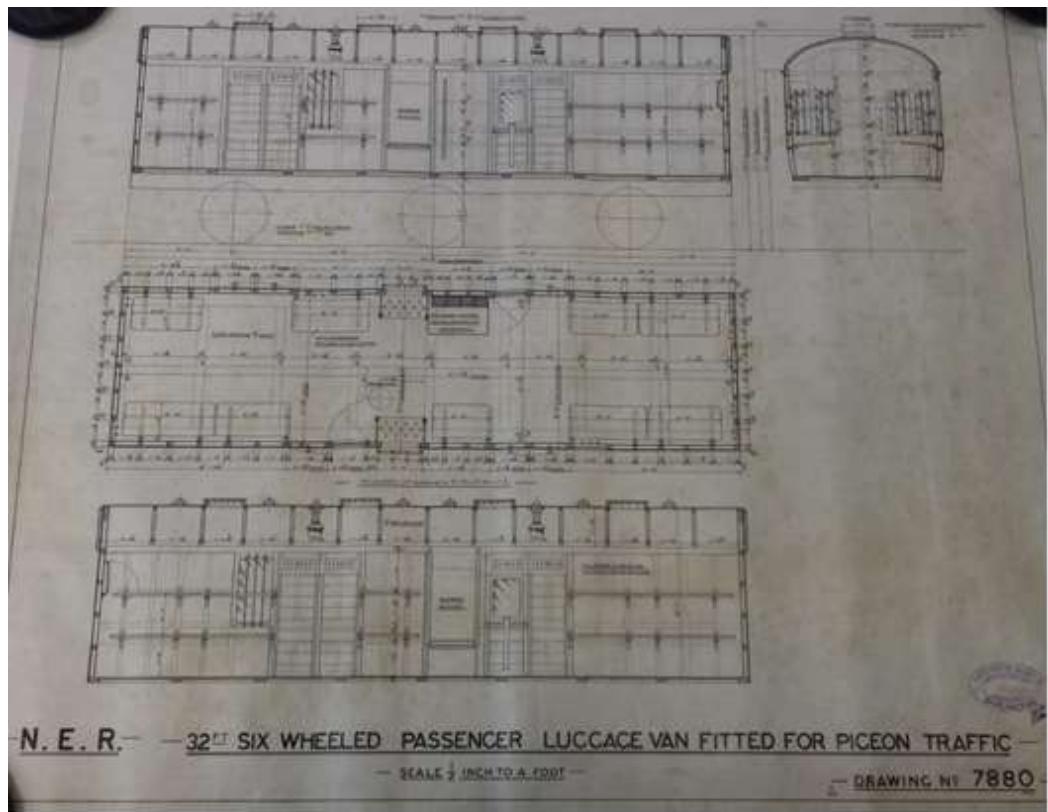


Figure 6.47: NER luggage van fitted for pigeon traffic, 1910 (top) and 1911 (bottom)
Source: Drawing No.7880 (top) and No.11660D (bottom) National Railway Museum, York

Railway companies ran race-day trains called 'pigeon specials', Logan stating that "the station authorities do the best they can, for they realise, at least on the northern lines, what a source of income this pigeon traffic is to the companies" (*RP*, 1899 (3(79):151)). The GWR, for instance, acknowledged that "a pigeon special...will convey in the panniers racers worth thousands of pounds" (*GWR*, 1932 (44(5):191)). Instructions were published by railway companies for their staff, explaining how to look after and liberate pigeons (fig. 6.48).

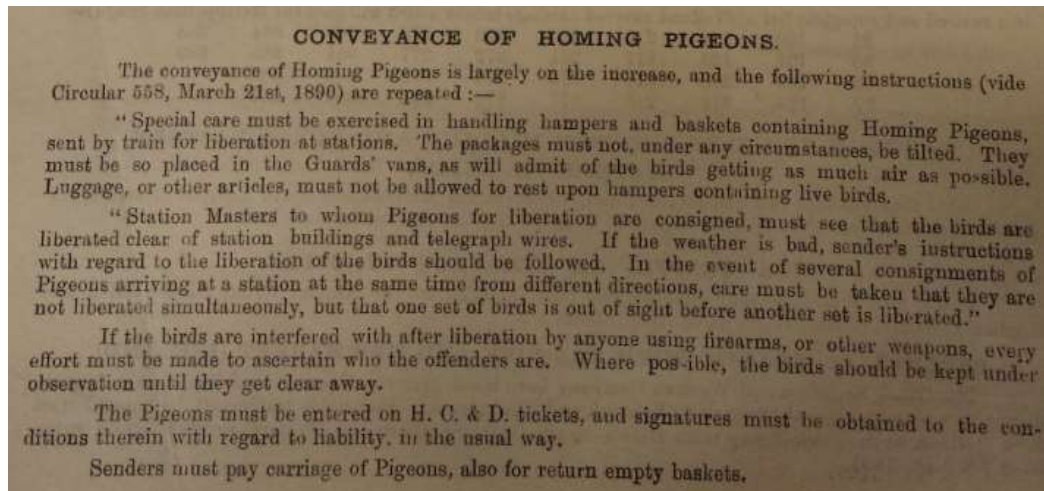


Figure 6.48: Extract from Midland Railway Company Circular No.600, August 30th 1892

Source: RFB05427, Midland Railway Study Centre, Derby

The volume of 'pigeon traffic' transported by railway companies regularly made the news in their staff magazines. In June 1927, for instance, the LNER reported that, for just one Up North Combine race, multiple trains had carried 2,000 baskets containing 52,000 pigeons from Newcastle to Peterborough. In the 1928 season, the LMS reported carrying over 7 million birds – 300,000 baskets – its magazine stating: "this, alone, really suffices to show that pigeon training and racing is a very important railway traffic" (*LMS*, 1929 (6(2):43)). The LMS claimed to "appreciate the traffic", referring to their relationship with pigeon racers as "most cordial" (*LMS*, 1929 (6(2):45, 47)).

Convoying arrangements could be very complex. Arrangements for the 1905 Lancashire Combine's Nantes race, for instance, reveal an intricate timetable of trains leaving from 14 stations, carrying birds from 16 different Federations to Manchester Victoria (fig. 6.49). From there, two special trains took the birds to Southampton docks, where the London and South Western Railway Company had organised a boat to St Malo. The birds completed their journey by French railway,

in transit, the NHU regularly dealing with legal cases against railway companies. Whilst railway staff were provided with instructions, there were still instances of negligence reported by both racers and the companies themselves. An 1898 South Eastern Railway Circular (No.200, 13th June, 1898), for instance, entitled “pigeon killed in transit” warned employees of negligence. Furthermore, in 1909, the Midland Railway Company’s Superintendent of the Line issued a circular to all stationmasters stating that the NHU had complained about:

“general indifference of the staff...negligence at transfer stations...with the result that the birds arrive at their destination stations late... failure of the guards to put the baskets out at the stations...Delays in liberating the birds...insufficient care taken by the staff in liberating the birds at a suitable place...Delays in the return of empties” (MR Circular No.1124, May 28th 1909).



Figure 6.50: “Loft in Portobello Goods Station, L. & N.E. RLY”, 1930

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1930 (52(2499):244)

One of the most common complaints in *The Racing Pigeon* was that railway rates were too high. As explained in Chapter 4, baskets of both fancy and racing pigeons were charged at ordinary parcel rates by weight and distance (see fig. 4.25). According to an article in the LMS’s magazine, in 1929, baskets of racing pigeons weighed, on average, 15-40lbs, and cost between 1s. 2d. and 2s. 6d., including a standard charge of 4d. for the return of empty baskets (*LMS*, 1929 (6(2):43)). From 1923 – the year that railway companies were ‘grouped’ into ‘the

Big Four' – pigeons were also carried 'at owner's risk', reportedly "saving fanciers about 25 per cent on the cost" (*RP*, 1923 (42(2111):245)).

6.6 The Convoyers

Instead of relying on railway staff, some clubs employed convoyers – or 'liberators' – to accompany birds to races. These were men with experience and knowledge of pigeon racing, but, to avoid suspicion of foul-play, they themselves did not race. Convoying was a regular topic for discussion in *The Racing Pigeon*, described as a "matter...of supreme importance (*RP*, 1904 (12(569):582)), and "a knotty one...in need of reform" (*RP*, 1905 (15(726):608)).

An article by a Belgian racer, suggested that, whilst convoyers were "the absolute master of the consignment entrusted to him", they were also servants to the birds they carried, calling the birds "his hosts" (*RP*, 1908 (20(968):268)). Convoyers were responsible for feeding and watering birds in transit, and ensuring a safe liberation in suitable weather conditions. Carelessness could affect the results of races and, in the worst cases, kill birds. As a result, pigeon racers were eager to regulate and standardise the conduct of convoyers which, it was thought, would reduce the occurrence of 'smashes' – races in which the majority of birds were lost or killed. In an attempt to standardise convoyers' actions, some clubs, federations, and combines produced instructions, similar to those for railway staff. By way of example, in 1904, *The Racing Pigeon* published the West Lancashire Saturday Federation's convoyer instructions:

"Examine all baskets before proceeding...to see that they are in good order and properly sealed...wire the time of liberation to each club's telegraphic address...Upon no account liberate at any stage before the birds have been watered...It is also particularly requested that the convoyer obtains correct Greenwich time of liberation" (*RP*, 1904 (12(568):571)).

Convoyers, then, had a considerable duty. *The Racing Pigeon* recommended "at least one man ought to go with every 1,000 birds" (*RP*, 1923 (42(2130):580)), although convoyers wrote that they were often left with too many birds to tend to. They were also reportedly paid "barely labourers' wages" and felt under-

appreciated (*RP*, 1904 (12(568):572)). One explained that they were “not sufficiently compensated for the amount of time and trouble”, adding: “the excess responsibility placed on our shoulders seems all to be forgotten” (*RP*, 1905 (14(672):572)). Others complained of racers “constantly accusing us of being practically unfit for the job” (*RP*, 1905 (14(673):603)). Indeed, letters to the paper regularly criticised convoyers for not feeding or watering birds correctly, not paying sufficient attention to the weather before liberating, or for liberating in dangerous locations (fig. 6.51).



Figure 6.51: “A trip to Lerwick: A liberation of pigeons in the street of this town, showing the risk of damage through possible crashing into the houses”

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1932 (55(2572):117))

At the end of the 1930 season, the NHU President stressed that “sooner or later it would be necessary to license convoyers” (*RP*, 1930 (52(2498):230)). Racers wanted “some control of them...with licences they can be disciplined and, if necessary, inhibited”, the Union report wrote (*RP*, 1930 (52(2498):230)). In 1932, the NHU ruled that licences costing 2s. 6d. were to be “compulsory for convoyers” (*RP*, 1932 (56(2604):261)). This, however, did little to aid convoyers’ abilities to interpret weather conditions and make safe liberations which, many racers acknowledged, seriously threatened the sport.

6.6.1 The Weather

The Homing Pigeon Annual (1915:12) declared that “no sport is indebted to meteorology more than pigeon racing”. Indeed, weather had a vital influence on the outcomes of pigeon races, frustrating racers due to its “glorious uncertainty” (*RP*, 1899 (3(92):337)). The aerial dimension, then, posed serious challenges to pigeon racers and their birds. As a result, racers sought to understand the

complexities of weather systems, to reduce the effect of 'luck' in determining results. Convoyers had to understand, interpret, and predict weather forecasts, and have an intimate knowledge of the local geographies of race routes. A convoyer was expected to read and interpret the landscape around him, one article in *The Racing Pigeon* stating:

“a convoyer must...possess such information of the topography of the district...see where he is by means of the compass...judge the prevailing wind by consulting the direction of the clouds and the position of the weather cocks...landmarks...will be a second means of taking his bearings...[and] The rise of the sun” (*RP*, 1908 (20(968):269)).

If it was not safe to liberate the birds, convoyers could choose to hold them over until the next day. 'Hold-overs' were a common topic in *The Racing Pigeon*, racers criticising convoyers for delaying liberations unnecessarily – causing them inconvenience – and, equally, for practising what were termed 'any weather liberations', which were dangerous for birds. Local racers, weather experts, the Air Ministry, and the Meteorological Office sent weather information to convoyers via telegram, which was used in combination with local newspapers and on-site barometer assessments. Detailed weather forecasts for the liberation point and at 'home' were needed, especially for long races during which the weather could change, convoyers requiring “direction and force of wind, state of atmosphere and clouds and temperature, and, if possible, whether the barometer is rising or falling” (*RP*, 1905 (14(667):490)). Convoyers were also required to send regular updates to club secretaries, especially if the liberation was delayed. For Continental races, which sometimes started very early in the morning, arrangements were reportedly made with the Post Office for them to open earlier.

The pigeon racer at home in his loft also became an amateur meteorologist, one regular columnist in *The Racing Pigeon* remarking that there had been a “craze of weather forecasting and successful cyclone dodging” since the turn of the twentieth century (*RP*, 1904 (12(565):679)). “Careful study of the weather”, the paper advised, “will make a good fancier a better one”, some believing that this connection to meteorology made the sport a ‘science’ (*RP*, 1923 (42(2100):25)). Racers became experts about local weather conditions, most using barometers to

predict the weather, whilst others relied on folklore-like observations. One racer warned:

“be chary to train your birds when you see sea-gulls come inland for food; or wild fowl are leaving marshy ground for higher localities; the rooks and swallows fly low; frogs croaking unusually loud; sheep huddling together under trees and bushes...Beware of red sky in the morning...A grey sky in the morning is invariably followed by a fine day...Dews and fogs generally indicate fine weather. Windy weather may be expected when the sky is bright yellow at sunset, or when clouds have hard edges” (*RP*, 1899 (3(92):337)).

As amateur meteorologists, then, pigeon racers developed their own specialist knowledge and, in keeping with the surge of popular science in the late-nineteenth century (Boyd and McWilliam, 2007), they became fascinated by the science of meteorology. In 1928, the NHU inaugurated a ‘Weather Forecast Service’, which later became a sub-Committee of the Union, in charge of providing race-day forecasts. Nevertheless, in 1935 there was still no “system that will operate throughout the country” (*RP*, 1935 (62(2768):321)). The difficulty was, *The Racing Pigeon* stated, “to appreciate the meaning of weather forecasts...to translate weather forecasts into pigeon-flying probability” (*RP*, 1935 (62(2768):321)). The weather was, therefore, something that pigeon racers could not fully understand, making liberation points potentially dangerous spaces for pigeons.

In 1935, the North Road Championship Club reportedly became the first racing pigeon body to fund “research into the type of weather suitable for pigeon racing”, a committee appointed to meet with the Meteorological Office (*RP*, 1935 (62(2768):319)). *The Racing Pigeon* called this “a milestone in the progress of long-distance flying...the beginning of an era” (*RP*, 1935 (62(2768):321)). The motion was proposed by successful breeder and racer Dr Morton Everard Tresidder (fig. 6.52), who was also an influential mover in standardising the measurement and timing of races (see Section 6.7), as well as an advocate of Mendelian breeding principles (see Chapter 7). Having graduated from the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1897, Tresidder published a book entitled *Meteorological Facts and Their Influence on Pigeon Races* (1904), his objective to

show that “in a large majority of cases disastrous results...are attributable to cyclonic pressure” (*RP*, 1904 (13(638):834)). W.H. Osman wrote: “few have made a closer study of long-distance pigeon racing”, calling Tresidder one of the “pillars of the sport” (*RP*, 1933 (57(2625):107)).



Figure 6.52: Dr. M.E. Tresidder

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1933 (57(2625):107)

Whilst weather forecasts were useful for predicting conditions during a race, they were also used retrospectively to explain race results. *The Racing Pigeon* published – infrequently at first, but weekly during the 1938 season – retrospective weather reports, charts, and maps (fig. 6.53) using data from the Government, the Air Ministry, and the Automobile Association, describing the weather conditions that prevailed on the previous race day. Pigeon racing, therefore, became closely entangled with the science of meteorology, racers seeking to understand the vertical volume.



Figure 6.53: Weather map for August 6th published in ‘*The Racing Pigeon*’, August 13th 1938

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1938 (68(2909):115)

6.7 Through Time and Space

The results of pigeon races were ascertained by calculating an average velocity, a complicated calculation which questioned racers' conceptualisations and measurements of time and distance. Through these calculations – which demanded a specialised mathematical understanding – pigeon racers attempted to create a measured and controlled geography of the pigeon race, the birds' movement framed as almost formulaic in order to ensure standardised and accurate results. The structures behind long-distance racing interestingly echo academic research under the rubric of 'time geography', time and space inseparably intertwined, together shaping – or choreographing – the movement and interaction of people and environments (Pred, 1977; Carlstein et al., 1978; May and Thrift, 2001; Stein, 2001). For pigeon racers – as in time geography – definitions of time and space were constructed, contested, and mutable, velocity calculations redefining the aerial spaces of long-distance races, and reinforcing both the achievements of winning birds and the reputations of their owners. Racing pigeons were capable of flying at speeds of 50 miles per hour for races up to 200 miles, and 30 miles per hour for races as long as 800 miles. The velocities of their birds, it can be argued, acted as a form of time-space compression, distorting the distance between places on the map both nationally and internationally.

One racer, in 1902, explained that the “correctness” of velocity calculations depended upon:

- “1. The correctness with which –
 - a) The time of departure,
 - b) The time of arrival,
 - c) The position of the starting point,
 - d) The position of the finishing point are known, and
 2. The method adopted for the computation of the intervening distance”
- (*RP*, 1902 (9(416):593)).

The degree of accuracy to which the four temporal and spatial variables (a-d) were known ensured precision, uniformity, and standardisation in the calculation of results, one of the NHU's main objectives. The first variable – time of departure – could be known to “within a second or two”, dependent on the convoyer or

railway staff accurately recording liberation times according to GMT. Inaccurate liberation times were often blamed for what racers called ‘impossible velocities’, defined as “one which no homing pigeon could make under the conditions...when the race was flown” (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1910:47). It is, however, the more frequent debates about how to accurately denote the time of arrival, and how to calculate a bird’s flying time, that the following section will address, as well as the delineation of the two spatial variables – liberation point and loft position – and the computational methods used to determine ‘flying distance’.

6.7.1 A Race Against Time

From a geographical point of view, time can be seen as a structuring agent, shaping spaces and our understanding and experience of them. Our sense of time is, however, never singular, frequently reconstituted by various social – and inherently spatial – influences (Glennie and Thrift, 1996; May and Thrift, 2001). Glennie and Thrift (1996), for instance, emphasise the multiplicity of ‘time-senses’ and the periodically changing relationships between time and society based on technological, economic, and social developments.

For pigeon racers, the passage of time during a race was complexly affected by different factors. In calculating the flying time of racing pigeons, then, detailed systems of allowances and adjustments were made to birds’ velocities to make results as ‘accurate’ as possible, conduct thought necessary for an increasingly competitive and lucrative sport. Thus, as Carlstein et al. (1978:2) suggest, timing devices such as watches and clocks only provided ways of timing “relation states”, whereas social “embellishments” made time *meaningful*. In long-distance pigeon racing, such ‘embellishments’ took the form of adjustments made to velocities, described by one racer as “man-made efforts”, which aimed to make results more representative of the birds’ – and racers’ – achievements (*RP*, 1935 (62(2767):305)). For pigeon racers, then, the meaning of time was mutable and socially constructed.

An example of such an adjustment was the time allowance made in an attempt “to meet the great difficulty of birds competing together over vast different distances”, racers acknowledging that birds flying further would tire and slow down (*RP*, 1902 (9(411):507)). For Dr Tresidder, “the amount of tiring...[was] a

geometrical progression”, influenced by both the duration and distance of races, although admitted the difficulty of understanding this slowing effect (*RP*, 1902 (8(335):137)). The solution was to give birds ‘time allowances’. The NFC’s rules, for instance, stated that the Grand National was “to be flown on the system of velocity proper, until the end of the second day”, after which an allowance was made at a “rate of two minutes per mile to commence at 4 a.m. on the third day and continue until the race closes” (*RP*, 1898 (1(1):53)). However, Logan admitted, wind direction and intensity could make the allowance too generous in some regions and insufficient in others, meaning that a fixed time allowance would never be fair. A similarly provocative and complicated adjustment was made to velocities for ‘hours of darkness’, the NFC’s rules stating that eight hours per day should “be deducted for darkness” (*RP*, 1898 (1(1):53)). During this time, it was assumed that the birds would rest, although racers admitted there was no way of ever knowing the experiences of birds in-the-air. However, Logan contested, hours of darkness varied month-to-month as well as geographically, Dr Tresidder suggesting instead that a flexible allowance be calculated based on the first six pigeons home in each race. Pigeon racers, then, had different interpretations and experiences of time.

When the birds arrived at their loft, their rubber race rings were removed and either placed in the racer’s timing clock or, if the racer did not own a clock, the rings – sometimes still attached to the birds – were taken to the Post Office and a telegram sent to their club stating the ring number and time of arrival at the Post Office. The use of telegrams was, many racers believed, an “unsatisfactory method of timing”, complaining that the Post Office clocks were often inaccurate or their staff were too slow (*RP*, 1908 (21(1047):692)). Furthermore, complicated time allowances – or compromises with staff – had to be made for birds arriving whilst Post Offices were closed. This method, however, was commonly practised in the early days of long-distance racing, and continued to be used by those who could not afford a clock or by “old bitter antagonists that opposed modern methods of progress” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1749):195)).

It was, therefore, necessary to make further adjustments to birds’ velocities to allow for the time spent getting to the Post Office, the distance between a racer’s loft and the Post Office termed ‘running distance’. The time allowance stated in the NFC’s rules was “first half mile, three minutes; second half mile, two minutes;

afterwards at the rate of three minutes per mile" (*RP*, 1898 (1(1):53)), although Osman bemoaned that a uniform allowance did not take into account the differing topographies of racers' routes (Squills, 1912). The allowance, however, was not generous, and, since time could be lost and gained, racers approached the Post Office with "wondrous rapidity" (Tegetmeier, 1867:278) and at "breakneck speed" (*RP*, 1905 (14(682):755)). Some racers employed 'runners', who could cover the distance faster, whilst others used 'relays' of runners stationed along the route. For some, this was an "exciting rush through the streets" (*RP*, 1902 (8(334):121)), whilst others condemned it as an "awful hurry, scurry and worry...unpleasant and troublesome" (*RP*, 1899 (2(52):227)). This, some argued, was another reason that the sport suffered from prejudice, the rush through the streets conflicting with the popular notion of 'respectable' behaviour. Some clubs specified permissible modes of covering the running distance, the Stone and District Homing Society, for instance, in 1899 explaining: "to ride, drive, or cycle, half the time as recorded here will be allowed" (*RP*, 1899 (2(56):293)). The NFC, on the other hand, in 1914, prohibited the use of "mechanically-driven machines" (*RP*, 1914 (32(1590):118)).

Racers were, therefore, constantly looking for faster ways of covering running distances – and gaining time – which, they worried, made the system "unfair" (*RP*, 1899 (2(44):92)). In running distances, Dr Tresidder explained, "a man may gain or lose 15 seconds, and 15 seconds in a 1,760 yards velocity equals a quarter of a mile in distance" (*RP*, 1902 (8(347):345)). As a result, some resorted to "'over the garden wall tactics', running 'short cuts', [or] overmeasuring...running distances" (*RP*, 1902 (8(332):82)). The accurate measurement of running distances, Osman claimed, was crucial. In the 1890s, running distances were reportedly 'stepped out', a method considered good enough at the time "because something more than minutes divided the race winners" (*RP*, 1908 (20(976):384)). However, like in most sports during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Eichberg, 1982), as racing became more competitive and seconds divided winners, racers called for greater accuracy, and standardisation, such as "a proper mechanical wheel or a chain" (*RP*, 1908 (20(976):384)). The use of telegrams to announce arrivals was, therefore, criticised for its lack of precision and consistency, described by *The Racing Pigeon* as a "happy-go-lucky principle" (*RP*, 1899 (2(44):92)). By 1939, the NHU stated that "in no circumstances shall

telegrams be allowed in any race flown under N.H.U. rules" (*RP*, 1939 (69(2954):343)).

Osman argued that absolute precision, fairness, and standardisation could not be achieved "except by the compulsory use of clocks" instead of telegrams (Squills, 1912:13). One advert, in 1902 (fig. 6.54), for instance, suggested that clocks could "elevate the sport", eliminating the "crowd of runners hanging round your house on race days" (*RP*, 1902 (9(428):788)). Pigeon racers referred to their special timing clocks as 'automatic timers' and the act of timing in as 'automatic verification', emphasising both the simplicity and supposed reliability of this method. As competition became keener and the prizes more valuable, then, pigeon racers sought for more reliable measures of time. According to Eichberg (1982:45), eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sports were generally "characterized by the increasing importance assigned to the measurement and recording of time". The use of timing technology, Eichberg (1982:47) claims, developed out of a "new orientation toward time and achievement", triggered by "a new sort of social behaviour which needed winners *and* quantitative data. It is, in itself, *social*". The social diffusion of 'clock-time' more generally, Glennie and Thrift (1996) add, was due to restructuring of work habits and a desire for body-time discipline. The precise timing of pigeon races, therefore, was underpinned by the increasingly competitive nature of the sport, as well as social contests for control, pride, and reputation.



Figure 6.54: Images from an advert for the Derby Timer showing racers timing in using the Post Office versus a clock, 1902

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1902 (9(428):788)

In 1899, the NFC and Central Counties F.C. were reportedly the first clubs to promote the use of clocks. Cost was, however, a major deterrent. In 1905, for

instance, two of the most popular clocks – Gerard and Toulet – cost £6 and £4 respectively, making it “out of the question to expect each member...of a working mens club to possess one” (*RP*, 1905 (15(724):564)). There was, therefore, an uneven politics surrounding clocks, wealthier racers becoming, what Glennie and Thrift (1996:292) would call, “mediators of temporal skills”. In some instances, clubs invested in one central clock kept at the clubhouse, whilst some racers shared or rented clocks. Nonetheless, by 1930, one racer wrote, “in large numbers clubs clocks are made compulsory”, there being approximately 50,000 clocks in use (*RP*, 1930 (51(2366):91)).

There were different models of clock (fig. 6.55) used by pigeon racers, although they largely worked in the same way: when the rubber race ring was inserted, a lever was pulled and a needle punctured or printed the time onto paper dials. The most popular were all Belgian – the Toulet, Gerard, Habicht, and Barker. In 1908, Osman and a group of racers set up ‘The Automatic Timing Company’ (fig. 6.56) “to take up the provision of reliable timers for sale or hire” (*RP*, 1908 (20(967):i)). Working with clock experts and the NHU Council, the Company tested clocks, recommended alterations to manufacturers, and sold and rented Toulet clocks, praising them as “the best...most popular” (*RP*, 1908 (20(967):i)). The suitability of different clock models, however, was periodically debated in *The Racing Pigeon* and at NHU and NFC meetings. The models favoured changed periodically, further adding to the struggle for consistency in the calculation of results.

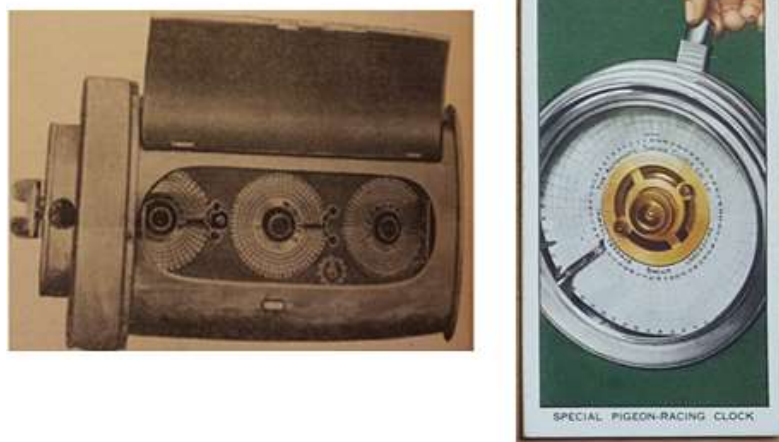


Figure 6.55: Gerard Clock, 1902 (left); Toulet Clock, 1931 (right)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1902 (9(429):794); Ogdens (1931) *Racing Pigeons*, No.42

ACCURACY IS ESSENTIAL
in Timing-in Clocks
and ACCURACY is OBTAINED
if you

USE A TOULET

THIS POPULAR TWO-DIAL CLOCK CAN NOW BE SUPPLIED BY RETURN
FITTED WITH THE NEW SAFETY CONE AND DIAL CARRIER NUTS.

PRICE £6.6.0. COMPLETE WITH ACCESSORIES.

The most easily set, THE BEST on the market, can be read by all and sundry,
and has a **NON-MAGNETIC BALANCE.**

We are now booking applications for the hire of Clocks for Season 1939.

£1 PER SEASON

Do not be disappointed, early application is advised.

Carriage Paid and including **KEY, TELESCOPIC TIMING-IN BOXES**, the use of which is
now made compulsory by the National Homing Union, and **1 DOZ. SETS OF DIALS.** **EARLY**
APPLICATION with HIRING FEE IS ADVISED as number of clocks available for hire is strictly
limited.

REPAIRS.—In order that Fanciers can have their Toulet Clocks repaired by skilled workmen
who have specialised in the Toulet Clock, the Company has established its own Repair Department
at Bacup. Charges are low as possible. Now is the time to send before the racing season opens.

In all correspondence please give clock number and station to which clocks are to be sent.

DIALS.—For 10, 12 or 18 bird Clocks, 1 doz. sets 1/-. For 3 dial 12 bird Clocks, 1 doz.
sets 1/-. Only dozens supplied. Coupons of the face value of 3d. will still be given with all dial
and timing box orders. **SAMPLES OF DIALS MUST ACCOMPANY ORDERS.**

KEYS, 9d. STEEL CONES, 9d. BINDING NUTS, 9d. TELESCOPIC TIMING-
IN BOXES, 1/6 per doz.

FOR QUANTITIES WILL SUPPLY 24 doz. Sets Dials at £1; 1 gross boxes, 13/-.
DIALS OR OTHER SUNDRIES CANNOT BE SENT ON CREDIT.

THE AUTOMATIC TIMING CLOCK CO. LTD.,
IRWELL TERRACE, BACUP, LANCs.

Figure 6.56: Advert for the Automatic Timing Clock Company Ltd.'s Toulet Clock, 1939

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1939 (69(2933):25)

The use of clocks required an increased level of regulation and surveillance. Before each race, during 'marking', racers took their clocks – or sent them by train – to the clubhouse or federation headquarters to be checked by an appointed committee of official clock setters, who synchronised them to a master clock. Natural variations in clocks were checked by club secretaries and the clocks were sealed to prevent tampering, some clubs retaining them during the season and others checking them after each race. Nevertheless, attempts to cheat by altering clocks to gain time – termed 'clock-faking' – were reported in *The Racing Pigeon* relatively often, Osman and Logan committed to stamping out this fraudulent practice. Amongst the methods mentioned to slow down clocks were

shaking them (detected by a fitted dolometer), standing them face-down, heating them up (detected by a fitted thermometer), and carefully removing the glass front to tamper with the mechanism. Nonetheless, a regular columnist in *The Racing Pigeon* suggested that, with the thoroughness of regulations in long-distance racing, “the opportunities for fraudulent practices” were “reduced to a minimum” (*RP*, 1904 (13(618):493)).

Exhibitions of clocks were sometimes held in conjunction with pigeon shows and at NHU meetings, the Union offering certificates to approved clocks. The Union and the NFC elected committees to test new clocks and investigate clock-faking claims, liaising with two ‘experts’: Mr Turner, a clock-maker, and Mr Jones, a spectacle-manufacturer and racer. Rival clock-manufacturers were invited to present their clocks for inspection, the committees endeavouring to ‘fake’ the clocks. In 1902, for instance, Mr Jones became known as “the man who faked the Toulet”, demonstrating how this popular clock could be altered without any visible signs of tampering (*RP*, 1902 (8(336):155)). The operation was, however, he admitted, a very skilful and delicate one, requiring the removal of a tiny screw on the locking bolt. Clock-makers, it appears, revelled in – and appreciated – these opportunities to submit their clocks for inspection, Monsieur Gerard calling clock committees “the best clock experts in England” (*RP*, 1902 (8(349):382)). One of the greatest expenses in clock manufacture, then, was making them ‘fake-proof’. An Ogdens (1931, No.42) cigarette card, however, perhaps naïvely, told its non-racing audience: “owing to the special way in which they are made it is impossible to tamper with these clocks”. Most racers, on the other hand, suggested otherwise, that it was “practically impossible to make a machine impregnable”, and criticised the Union for not eradicating clock-faking (*RP*, 1902 (8(349):385)). Thus, despite racers’ attempts to understand, control, and regulate time, the extent to which there could be true uniformity in the timing of races was limited. As Glennie and Thrift (1996:291) state, clock-time can give a “misleadingly precise, ‘un-fuzzy’ impression” of everyday life, the metrics of the clock only tangentially relating to our experience of the passage of time.

6.7.2 Measuring Flying Distances

In calculating race results, two spatial variables were also used to determine what was termed ‘flying distance’ and calculate the birds’ velocities: liberation

point and loft location. Flying distances were commonly discussed in *The Racing Pigeon* and at NHU meetings, the sport becoming heavily enmeshed in inherently geographical debates about the measurement and definition of space. Whilst racers acknowledged that it was “not possible to say what course a pigeon really takes”, the accurate location of liberation and loft locations was vital (*RP*, 1902 (9(416):593)). As they tried to accurately plot points on the Earth’s surface, then, racers sought to understand and measure the relatively unknown aerial spaces through which their birds moved.

In the original method of measuring flying distances, “members...pricked their positions on the maps, and the committee...measured the distances”, Osman wrote (*RP*, 1908 (21(1045):657)). The maps used varied in scale and detail and, as a result, some loft locations were reportedly “a quarter of a mile or more off the mark” (*RP*, 1908 (20(970):294)). As races became more competitive, however, and seconds separated birds, racers desired greater computational precision. At the turn of the twentieth century, then, locations were mapped and distances measured by trusted racers referred to as ‘calculators’ (fig. 6.57). This involved an understanding of latitude and longitude, and an ability to use logarithmic tables and conversion charts. The calculation was, one racer wrote, “one of the highest in spherical trigonometry...above the heads of nine hundred and ninety-nine fanciers in every thousand” (*RP*, 1908 (20(1001):774)). At the beginning of each season, the liberation points for clubs’ races were mapped and recorded by official calculators, the NHU stating that “for the sake of uniformity in every case the centre of the railway station shall be taken” as the liberation point, although there was no way of ensuring that liberators stuck to this (*RP*, 1908 (20(944):646)). With accurate loft locations, clubs could calculate and publish lists of members’ flying distances for each race point, along with running distances and time allowances (fig. 6.58). Each racer’s entries to Union and NFC races had to be accompanied by a loft location map, rules specifying the use of “six inches to the mile scale and the official Ordnance Survey map” (Squills, 1912:8).



Figure 6.57: Advert for measurements made by the NFC's official calculator (and clock setter) Mr Howden, 1914

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1914 (32(1601):277)

Crystal Palace (N. R.) F. C.										
	Essendon.	Claypole.	Retford.	York.	Newcastle.	Perth.	Banff.	Shetland*.	R.D.	T.A.
Beard, J.	89 1395	113 1265	133 1650	178 1675	251 1530	367 50	442 600	605 510	320	65
Burnett, S.	86 1210	110 1210	131 60	175 1730	248 1050	364 575	439 595	602 30	934	191
Bignold, A. J.	89 800	113 935	133 1600	178 1440	251 1355	367 470	442 265	604 1110	350	72
Bellum, J.	90 395	114 560	134 1220	179 1080	252 960	368 140	442 1005	605 610	900	184
Della Rocca, Mr.	88 50	112 190	132 830	177 700	250 600	365 1480	440 1280	603 410	660	135
Dewar, T. R.	84 1290	108 1500	129 430	174 230	247 125	362 1215	437 775	599 1600	492	101
Drane, C. W.	87 520	111 270	131 725	176 800	249 610	364 850	439 1510	602 1530	—	—
Edwards, J.	89 220	113 1345	134 660	178 1320	251 1265	368 750	441 1100	602 830	271	55
Howell, J. B.				Position of loft not returned.						
Lulham, E. H.	90 880	114 1110	135 70	179 1595	252 1540	368 850	443 355	605 920	760	1560
Larner, J. G.	94 520	119	139 1210	183 1590	256 1485	373 1300	446 1080	606 1700	Clock.	
Moss	}			Position of loft not returned.						
Moss	}									
Neales, J. M.	93 1240	117 1280	138 120	183 —	255 1670	371 550	446 600	608 1540	350	71
Peed, T.	89 600	123 715	133 1370	178 1210	251 1125	367 220	442 45	604 930	50	10
Popeon, J. C.	88 50	112 190	132 830	177 700	250 600	365 1480	437 775	599 1600	740	132
Roake, W. G.	87 1045	111 1420	132 415	177 120	250 55	365 1380	440 590	602 880	450	92
Saunders, E.				Position of loft not returned.						
Scott, Wm.	89 1740	114 150	134 780	179 650	252 560	367 1450	442 1180	605 190	1000	102*
Skinner, F. G.	87 400	111 940	132 —	176 1350	249 1320	365 1210	439 1765	601 1600	60	12
Tresidder, M. E.	87 1650	112 600	132 1485	177 1000	250 880	366 1160	440 1100	602 550	700	143
Waterman, A.	88 300	112 385	132 1010	177 910	250 860	365 1660	440 1510	603 770	415	85
Watson, W. E.	93 1150	117 1240	138 100	182 1740	255 1630	371 600	446 550	608 1400	600	124
Ward, A. A.	89 160	111 560	131 1330	176 1020	249 870	365 570	439 1450	601 1740	270	55
Wheatley, F.	90 1410	114 1390	135 220	180 165	253 40	368 580	443 800	606 220	640	130
Woodfin, W.	87 130	111 530	131 1300	176 990	249 940	365 540	439 1430	601 1740	850	174
Woodfield, J. W.	87 130	111 530	131 —	176 990	249 940	365 540	439 1430	601 1740	850	174

Figure 6.58: Crystal Palace North Road F.C.'s flying distances in miles and yards, running distances in yards ('R.D.'), and time allowances in seconds ('T.A.'), 1899

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899 (2(56):291)

Dr Tresidder, in 1899, was reportedly “the first principal mover” of the subject of uniform measurements in Britain, consulting Belgian experts and professional measurers and confronting the NHU (RP, 1908 (20(997):694)). He explained the importance of precision in marking loft locations, each second of latitude or longitude, he believed, equivalent to about 33 yards. Tresidder proposed a scheme whereby all flying distances were calculated by the NHU Centres at a charge of 4d. for clubs and 1s. for individuals, meaning that affiliated members

had “an official measurement which can never vary” and would “remain constant in whatever society they compete” (*RP*, 1899 (3(98):423)). This system was, however, never fully implemented, the measurement of loft locations, in some cases, still undertaken by clubs or individual racers. There were, therefore, a variety of methods used to calculate distance, Tresidder warning that “no two systems would agree” (*RP*, 1899 (3(98):423)). By way of illustration, one racer, in 1905, sent *The Racing Pigeon* his flying distances calculated from the same race points but by different people (fig.6.59).

Race point	1907 flying distances	1908 flying distances	Difference
Chard	126 miles 1,504yds	126 miles 1,284yds	220yds
Yeoford	160 miles 1,582yds	161 miles	178yds
Granville	191 miles 1,262yds	191 miles 510yds	752yds
Rennes	244 miles 300yds	241 miles 123yds	3 miles 177yds

Figure 6.59: Discrepancies in flying distances calculated by different people

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1905 (14(644):39)

There were at least four known methods used for calculating flying distances: the old method of marking maps by hand; Mercator’s system; the Great Circle system, used in ship navigation; and a system used by the NHU’s Geo. Yates – founder of Manchester Flying Club and co-founder of the NFC – called ‘Simplex’. According to the Manchester F.C., Mr Yates – who served as NHU Secretary in 1899 and Vice-President in 1908 – “had rendered the greatest possible service to the sport” through his dedication to “the question of measurements”, becoming the Union’s advisor on flying distances (*RP*, 1905 (15(740):931)).

The Mercator and Great Circle systems were the most commonly disputed in *The Racing Pigeon*, racers entering debates about cartographic projection and geographical representation. They were aware that, due to the curvature of the Earth’s surface, “the ‘straight line’ on the map does not correspond with the ‘straight line’ on the ground” (or, indeed, in the air) (*RP*, 1902 (9(416):594)). The Mercator projection made allowances for the distance between two points on a curved surface, racers explaining that, rather than a straight line, birds flew “the arc of a circle” (*RP*, 1902 (9(416):593)). However, whilst an accurate *navigational* tool, the Mercator projection distorted areas of land and sea (Sealy, 1996). Tresidder reportedly favoured the Mercator system for its simplicity and

recommended it to the NHU, although he preferred the Great Circle system for its *accuracy*, providing “a very close approximation to the true or geodesic distance” (RP, 1902 (9(416):594)). This method, he claimed, was “not readily understood” – indeed, it was not possible for aeroplanes or boats to follow the Great Circle tracks precisely (Sealy, 1996) – but, from 1908, the NHU and the NFC both promoted its use over the Mercator system, Yates adopting it in favour of his own method (fig. 6.60) (RP, 1902 (9(417):604)). In 1908, Tresidder proposed – unsuccessfully, it seems – that the Union grant licences to approved calculators, specifying one recognised method of calculation. Despite publishing formula books and conversion charts, however, racers criticised the Union for not ensuring that they were uniformly applied. Thus, pigeon racers’ desire for precision and standardisation in measurement was limited by the irregularity with which space was defined and measured.



Figure 6.60: Adverts for the Great Circle system, including Mr Yates’ advert (right), 1911
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1911 (26(1289):iii)

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter explores the social world of long-distance pigeon racing and the sport's formal organisation. The sport, often described by racers as a "fever", was a thrilling spectacle from start to finish, politically-charged by a desire to restructure practices, standardise conduct, and delineate time and space, complexly drawing racers and their birds together (*RP*, 1899 (2(48):166)). It also, however, connected pigeon racers with "many things outside pigeon racing proper", such as industry, transport, communications, science, and technology (*Squills Diary*, 1938:15). As the sport became more competitive, racers strove for greater precision, regulation, and standardisation, in order to give greater credibility to results, boost their reputations, and ensure fairness. Races were, then, more than simply avian contests.

Whilst the sport granted chances to all social classes, there were logistical inequalities that bodies and individuals within the sport's organisational structure tried to overcome. As a result, pigeon racers' inherently geographical debates show that the comparison of results was challenging, and the keeping of records of the fastest velocities was "absolutely valueless" (*RP*, 1898 (1(30):489)). Despite racers' efforts to undertake their pastime with scientific, mathematical, and geographical precision, then, some factors remained out of their control, the aerial spaces through which their birds navigated providing unknown and potentially dangerous conditions. Nonetheless, "Mr. Osman has often told us", one racer stated, "that it is the uncertainty of racing which makes our hobby so fascinating" (*RP*, 1908 (21(1057):848)).

Chapter 7 Feathered Athletes: Delineating Athleticism and Framing Fitness

Through the social and logistical structures that underpinned long-distance pigeon racing, racers and their birds became intimately intertwined. These birds were admired by racers, who tried to understand and hone their abilities through breeding and training, contributing to – in the words of the NHU’s objectives – ‘the improvement of the homing pigeon’. Thus, like nineteenth-century livestock breeders, pigeon racers sought to shape the physical qualities of their birds in order to create ‘improved’ animals.

An advert in *The Racing Pigeon* in 1902 for Dixon’s Gravel defined the racing pigeon as:

“the highest type of a cultivated love of home in the animal world. The highest type of magnificent physical vigour known in any living thing. The embodiment of pure and perfect health and vitality” (*RP*, 1902 (9(380):1)).

Whilst the hyperbole and enthusiasm is, perhaps, what one might expect from adverts, the apparent exaggeration may, in fact, also be interpreted as a passion and admiration for racing pigeons. As Williamson (1978) explains, adverts reflect culture, drawing on existing societal norms and translating them into a means of selling a product. Indeed, whilst the language used in the advert for Dixon’s Gravel may seem to embellish or over-state the prowess of racing pigeons, it echoes many of the letters and articles in *The Racing Pigeon*. It also reflects some of the criteria which pigeon racers believed made up their avian athletes – homing ability, physical strength, good health, and strategic training and breeding – each of which are covered in this chapter. The definition of a racing pigeon was, however, contested, subjective, and transient. A pigeon’s athleticism was, on the one hand, internal, invisible, and scientifically calculated, and, on the other hand, external, tangible, performative, and unpredictable. Interestingly, however, aesthetics also played a part in defining racing pigeons, exhibitions,

paintings, and photographs entering racers into debates about the place of athleticism within definitions of 'beauty'.

As struggles for human identity, long-distance pigeon racing reveals the ways in which human-animal pastimes map out society. These birds became embodiments of the racers who bred and trained them, valued as symbols of their ingenuity (Johnes, 2007), although racers themselves became similarly defined by their birds. It is, then, through investigation of the practices involved in pigeon racing that a better understanding of this mutual becoming can be understood. The breeding, training, and preparation of racing pigeons, it appears, reflected the respect and admiration that racers had for their birds, as well as the pragmatism, standardisation, and regulation with which their sport was practised. This chapter considers the ways in which pigeon racers framed ideas of 'athleticism', physically and metaphorically (re)shaping and (re)defining their birds in order to produce feathered athletes, illustrating the complexity of human-animal co-constitution in animal sports.

7.1 Breeding Athleticism

The breeding of racing pigeons received a lot of attention in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in books and *The Racing Pigeon*. Cultivating athletic ability proved a challenge for pigeon racers, who had to look through or beyond what was immediately visible to understand their birds. Whilst racing pigeons had to be physically fit, often the source of a pigeon's ability was not because of, but almost in spite of, their external features. Racers, it seems, had a strong desire to map a bird's exterior appearance and physical capabilities onto its interior, to understand how certain physical and mental characteristics could be inherited and refined through selective breeding. In their attempts to understand how to breed avian athletes, racers found themselves grappling with scientific theories, particularly the work of Darwin and Mendel. These breeding practices, then, saw pigeon racers become entangled in their birds' lives and bodies, engaging in both the 'art' and 'science' of breeding.

7.1.1 Breeding by Design

“To succeed with Homing Pigeons”, Logan (1924:15) wrote, “it is necessary to be very particular in the breeding of them”. Racers believed in Darwin’s notion of ‘the fancier’s eye’, trusting that such intuition and expertise were only acquired from years of detailed study. As a result, they spent a lot of time with their birds, their lofts (fig. 7.1) becoming spaces of observation and encounter. Through being in close proximity with their birds, one regular columnist in *The Racing Pigeon* explained, racers developed a “trained eye”, thus being transformed by a heightened sensibility to, and understanding of, their birds (RP, 1916 (35(1739):55)).

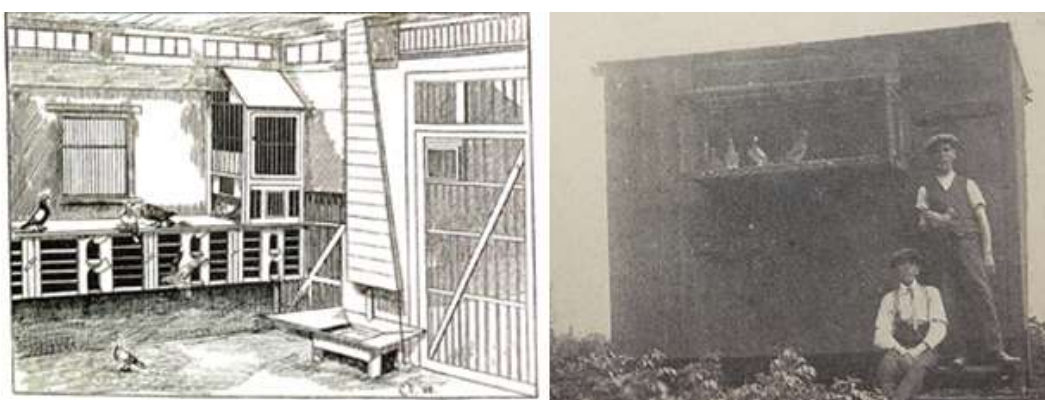


Figure 7.1: Racing pigeon lofts: “Inside view of Mr. Clutterbuck’s loft, showing cage for catching and feeding”, 1898 (left); “The home of the Welsh Hills Federation Championship Banff Winner”, 1913 (right)

Sources: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(15):242); *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1913:207)

Racers’ attention to detail was implemented in their record-keeping, either mentally, written down informally, or documented in stud books. Whilst stud books were produced by several manufacturers, “the earliest known example of a loft record book for fanciers ever produced” was published by Alfred Osman (as ‘Squills’) in 1898 (R. Osman, 1997:9). Osman explained that “there were many who trusted to memory both as to the stages they trained their birds, and their breeding”, his pocket-sized book designed for “utility” (*Squills Diary*, 1909:3). His *Squills Diary, Stud Book, Training Register and Almanack* was, he claimed, very popular, although no publication figures were printed. Whilst it is not clear how many racers used stud books, articles in books and *The Racing Pigeon* regularly recommended that racers kept breeding and training records to plan breeding and prove pedigree when selling birds.

Figure 7.2 shows an example of a filled-in record from a stud book, the owner unfortunately unknown. Each page was devoted to a mated pair – numbered for identification – and detailed their identifying features, strain, and parents. Details were also kept about their offspring; their ‘work done’ (i.e. training or races) and their ‘disposal’ (i.e. sold, lost, or killed). The stud book was, therefore, a biography of a loft, each entry defining a bird’s ‘value’ and predestining its life, and the book as a whole defining the pigeon racer, justifying his methods and reinforcing his reputation. Since racers did not have a full understanding of inheritance, as will be discussed, breeding could be unpredictable and uncontrollable. The practice of keeping records, then, made breeding methodological, calculative, and controlled.

SQUILLS' DIARY, 1938 91

PAIR NO. **17** MATED **3 MAR** STRAIN, **EDDLISTON X CITY BIRD**

C NURP. 37. WAS. 1829
DAM GAY BLUE PIED

H NURP. 37. WAS. 1828
BLUE HEN

SIRE NURP. 36. WAS. 2798
BLUE CHEQ

DAM NURP. 36. WAS. 2737
GAY BLUE PIED

SIRE NURP. 35. WAS. 1582
RED CHEQ

DAM NURP. 35. WAS. 1584
DARK CHEQ

FROM REF. "A" AND "B" AND "F"

FROM REF. "A" AND "B"

FROM REF. "H"

FROM REF. "A" AND "B"

Date of First Egg.	When Hatched.	Ring Nos. of Produce.	Work done, or how disposed of.
9 TH MAR	28 TH MAR	RP. 38. WAS. 1908 1909	FLOWN WELL
2 ND ROUND 15 TH APRIL			
		1829	NOT RACED OR TRAINED 1935
		NON 1 ST	WYOMOUTH Y.B. 1937. A. HAND RACE

Figure 7.2: Extract from a stud book, 1938

Source: Squills Diary (1938:91)

A series of articles by *The Racing Pigeon's* editorial team in 1902 entitled 'Famous Pigeons I Have Known' detailed the ancestry and performances of some of the most successful birds in history. This was, perhaps, the forerunner to a project completed by Osman four years later. In 1906, Osman compiled the first national stud list, which, he claimed, contained the "particulars of every noted pigeon or strain that had come before the public from the start of the sport in this country" (Osman, 1924:18). Published in his *Squills Diary* the same year, he explained:

"the idea has been...to bring the history of famous pigeons known in this country down to date. These birds have often been spoken of, but heretofore there has been no authentic record kept...SQUILLS' ANNUAL each year will, we hope, in future contain particulars of the most successful birds of the year...a reliable record of proved racing pigeons and their performances, with particulars of their strain, and the names of the owner and breeder" (*Squills Diary*, 1906 [pp63 in R. Osman, 1997]).

The first stud register listed 379 birds, beginning with twenty-two Logan birds, the remainder including birds from the Royal lofts, as well as Belgian breeders such as Messieurs Hansenne and Delmotte. Interestingly, however, despite his reputation as a successful breeder, none of Osman's own birds were included in the list. The stud list became a prestigious annual register, racers writing to him to consider their birds' details for inclusion. Osman, then, in constructing a list of 'famous' birds and their owners created an imagined order amongst the racing Fancy. Those birds included in the stud register were almost granted celebrity status. Likewise, their owners were very explicitly linked to their birds' achievements and gained repute, illustrated by an advert for contributions to the 1939 *Squills Diary* offering, in return, 'fame' (fig. 7.3). Nonetheless, Osman warned that stud records could become misleading, since "birds of wonderful paper pedigree" were not necessarily the most successful (*RP*, 1899 (3(101):460)). These prized birds were "literally pumped...out to the dregs", over-worked, and over-bred because of their 'potential' rather than their *actual* ability (*RP*, 1899 (3(101):460)). As another racer wrote, there could be "too much paper and not enough pigeon" (*RP*, 1916 (35(1736):8)). Thus, in reducing pigeons to stud records, it made them appear fixed or formulaic, providing a false sense stability and control over their performances.



Figure 7.3: Advert for the 1939 'Squills Diary'

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1938 (67(2919):300)

The space of the loft was used to help with mating, regulating the birds' movement. Each individual bird had its own nest box, but, once their mate was chosen for them, the birds were put together – 'paired' – either in a cordoned-off section or in a separate loft. Barker (1913:83) recommended breeding during February and March, clarifying that birds were not fit enough to race directly after breeding: "the interests of breeding and racing may be regarded in many ways as being diametrically opposed to one another", he explained. *The Feathered World's* racing correspondent, however, stressed that this was not the 'natural' time for pigeons to mate: "do what we will, the birds will refuse to obey the unnatural restrictions which we impose upon them", racers reportedly using china eggs to stop birds mating at 'inconvenient' times of the year (*FW*, 1916 (54(1389):185)). Thus, pigeon racers altered the natural rhythms of their birds, practices which could be framed as biopolitical acts aiming to control and manipulate avian bodies.

Racers' selective breeding practices, then, involved a strong element of design, carefully piecing together their athletes. Some racers spoke as if their birds were collectibles, often seeking birds with certain attributes for specific matings or to 'complete the stud'. There were three main approaches to breeding: inbreeding

or 'consanguinity' (mating to parents, children, or siblings); line-breeding (mating to grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nephews, or nieces); and cross-breeding or 'out-crossing' (mating unrelated birds). Inbreeding was very popular, used, as will be explained, in the production of 'strains'. Most racers agreed, however, that inbreeding, as shown by Darwin's experiments, could impair racing pigeons (Osman, 1910). Barker (1913:189), for instance, argued that inbreeding caused "loss of size...lack of constitutional vigour, and...diminished fertility". Cross-breeding, on the other hand, a regular columnist in *The Racing Pigeon* explained, aligned with Darwin's concept of 'hybrid vigour', stimulating "increased vigour and vitality in the off-spring" (*RP*, 1927 (46(2318):295)). Pigeon racers were, then, it seems, aware of – and engaged in – scientific debate about breeding. As one regular contributor to the paper wrote:

“a man is none the worse as a fancier for having some working acquaintance with any scientific knowledge which can possibly bear upon his particular hobby” (*RP*, 1910 (24(1184):325)).

Indeed, Darwin's work on selection was, one columnist claimed, “a subject...close to home for the keeper of racing pigeons” (*RP*, 1910 (24(1194):471)).

In the early-twentieth century, as biomedical advances drove the 'rediscovery' of Mendelism in the scientific world, pigeon racers were also considering how athleticism could be inherited and, therefore, controlled by selective breeding. *The Racing Pigeon* occasionally published scientific papers on Mendelism for its readers, although one racer stated that Mendel's theories were “often-mentioned, though, by most persons little understood” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1750):207)). Indeed, the reception of Mendelism within the scientific community itself was varied, there being a strong Edwardian resistance against Mendelian laws which, some scientists and mathematicians believed, could not be shown to be universally valid (Sloan, 2000). It must also be considered that, at this time, Mendelism was received “in the midst of a pre-existing debate over the role of variation in Darwinian evolution”, scientists – and pigeon fanciers – wary of reconciling the two theories (Sloan, 2000:1070).

Some pigeon racers argued that Mendelism was not applicable to their birds, Osman (1924:34) stating: “Mendel's laws may sound feasible, but when the

practical breeder comes to put them into practice, he finds that the reversion to remote ancestors has a way of its own". Thus, for pigeon racers, Mendelian inheritance could be refuted by Darwin's reversion which, they believed, explained 'throw backs' to the appearance of the Rock Dove in their breeding. Other racers argued that Mendelian laws could not be applied to racing pigeons because they were "a composite breed" (*RP*, 1916 (35(1749):195)), an amalgamation of Belgian breeds – such as the Cumulet of Antwerp and the Smerle of Liege – and English breeds – including the Dragoon, the Tumbler, and the Horseman (Tegetmeier, 1871). Some racers, therefore, believed that Mendelism was "of absolutely no practical use or value whatever to the breeder of racing pigeons" (*RP*, 1911 (26(1296):397)).

It was the controversial, and yet common, practice of 'colour breeding' that most closely linked pigeon racers to Mendelism. Some racers believed that certain colours of birds were better athletes, arguing – like some fancy pigeon breeders – that white or pale feathers were a sign of degeneracy and a lack of 'vigour'. Colour, then, some argued, was an "outward sign of an inward fitness" (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1913:35). Those who believed that colour denoted athleticism, sought to prove that, if colour could be inherited, so too could the alleged accompanying athletic qualities. In 1911, *The Racing Pigeon* published a paper entitled 'Colour Inheritance and Colour Pattern in Pigeons' by two racers – Mr Bonhote and Mr Smalley – whose research had been published by the Zoological Society. In their paper, they tabulated details of their breeding experiments, distinguishing between 'dominant' and 'dilute' colours. Using Mendelian principles, they found that:

"silver is dilute blue...Blue is dominant to silver (i.e., a self colour)...Chequering is dominant to its absence (i.e., a self colour)...Grizzling is dominant to chequering...Red in a mealy is apparently dominant to white...White and grizzling when they have met combine...Red combines with grizzling in the same way as does white" (*RP*, 1916 (35(1756):269)).

Whilst applications of Mendelian inheritance provided evidence for predicting the colour and patterning of offspring, most racers believed that the idea of colour denoting ability was a 'fallacy'. The majority of racers concurred that "a

good bird, like a good horse, is never a bad colour” (*RP*, 1899 (2(38):9)), Osman warning: “the true fancier who wishes to create a strain of long distance birds does not study the question from an aesthetic point of view” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1749):194)). He had, instead, his own ‘colour theory’, stating: “a bird off colour is anaemic, slow...below par” (Squills, 1909:8). Thus, colour breeding illustrated pigeon racers’ desires to identify – and the tension created by – visible markers of inherited abilities.

In 1939, Dr Tresidder published a review in *The Racing Pigeon* of a book entitled ‘Animal Breeding’ by Arend Hagedoorn (1885-1953), a “prominent geneticist” and “expert” animal breeder (Theunissen, 2014:55). He explained to racers – in language that echoed Mendelian geneticists – that inbreeding reduced “potential variability”, enhancing “the possibility of the mating of heterozygotes and thus the production of recessives”, leading to “degeneration” (*RP*, 1939 (70(2963):133)). However, he added, close inbreeding could also be advantageous, creating ‘pure’ animals and guaranteeing “the characters we want and require” (*RP*, 1939 (70(2963):133)). This, as will be explained, was the theory behind the production of racing pigeon strains. Tresidder’s review engaged explicitly with Mendelian thought: “the law of Mendel”, he argued, “applies in every detail to the sport” (*RP*, 1939 (70(2963):133)). Pigeon racers, therefore, engaged with popular scientific debate to differing extents, but also looked to create their own knowledge through their practices.

Racers generally acknowledged that certain characteristics in pigeons were hereditary, such as feathered legs, eye colour, or keel shape. Where they struggled, however, in an almost Darwin sense, was separating a pigeon’s inherited characteristics from those acquired through environmental influence or genetic mutation. In breeding pigeons, *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1915:7) explained, the birds were “subject to laws and forces which, in the present stage of our knowledge, we know little or nothing about”. Whilst pigeon racers had neither a sufficient understanding of, nor the means to practice, scientific breeding, it was likely that they did not desire to exploit Darwinian and Mendelian theories. Racers did, nonetheless, practice thorough, methodological, and calculated breeding based on their own observations and experience. Osman warned that “theory will not create a good sound strain of pigeons...only...hard work, extending over many many years” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1751):213)). A lot of

successful breeders admitted acquiring “knowledge by trial and error”, and quite often were unable to “communicate their art to others” (*RP*, 1930 (51(2478):263)). Pigeon racers, it seems, were heavily guided by their experience, as well as visual indicators of inheritance – feather colour, eye colour, and body shape – and, therefore, interpreted scientific theory in ways that best suited their sport.

7.1.2 A Pigeon's Pedigree

At the heart of racers' breeding practices – and facilitated by the use of stud books – was a preoccupation with pedigree or ancestry, similar to the prestige and power associated with pure-bred livestock and fancy breeding at this time. Whilst this could be interpreted as aristocratic, it could also, perhaps more accurately, be interpreted as simply another attempt to organise and advance this animal sport, as racers strove to create pigeons that could fly further and faster. Pedigrees of successful racing pigeons were often published in books, *Squills Dairies*, and *The Racing Pigeon*, detailed family histories used to explain racing successes (fig. 7.4). The majority of pigeon racers, Logan (1924:69) wrote, were “gluttons for pedigrees”, Osman (1924:18) adding that “without pedigree and ascendancy the breeding of live stock is a pure lottery”.

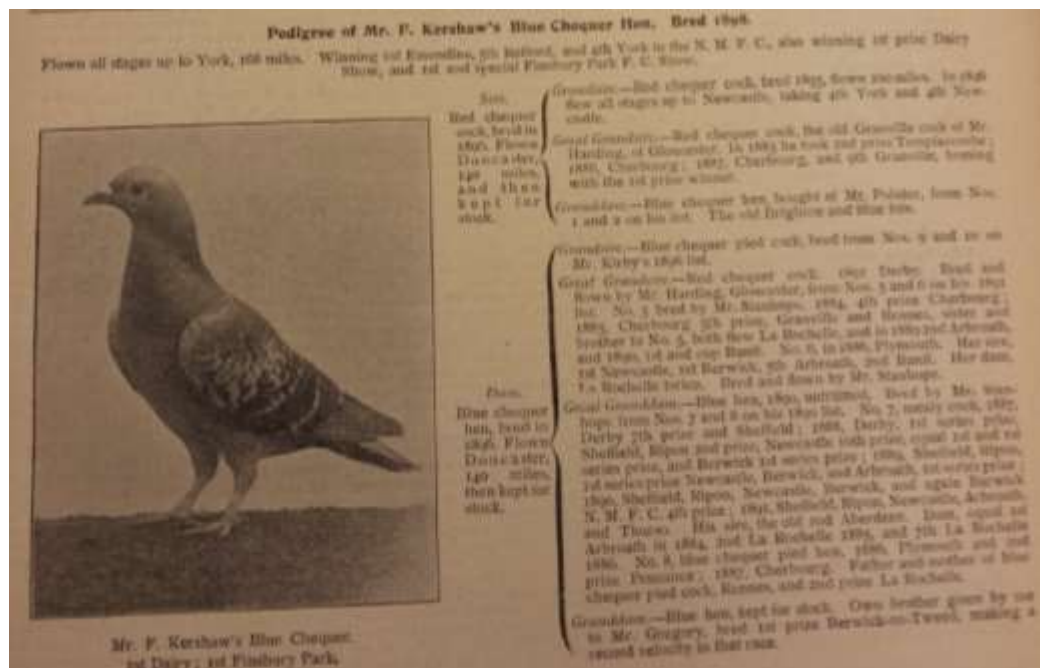


Figure 7.4: Example of a pedigree published in *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899 (2(39):23)

Pedigree breeding was calculated and methodological, attempts to 'fix' and replicate birds' physical performances based on their inherited qualities. "Pedigree is organised data", one racer wrote, "facts reduced to words and figures; it is a formula" (*RP*, 1918 (37(1873):267)). Many racers saw written pedigrees as a guarantee of athletic ability, one stating that birds were valued "as much for what they have done as for what we expect of them in the future" (*RP*, 1898 (1(33):533)), whilst another added that pedigrees were "the key to the understanding of the probable value of a pigeon" (*RP*, 1918 (37(1873):267)). Racers, then, believed that the opportunities for success were endless, the birds that they had bred representing only a fraction of their loft's future potential.

Imaginative athletic identities were anticipated and constructed for pigeons based on their close relatives, one article in *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1916:49) stating: "wrapped up in an individual bird, is the product of all its ancestry". Pedigree was so important in defining birds that adverts selling pigeons regularly detailed nothing about the birds themselves, focussing instead on the pair of pigeons that had reared them, de-individualising the birds for sale. This is shown by a catalogue (fig. 7.5) produced in 1907 by Mr Thoroughgood. Thoroughgood was reportedly "one of the early pioneers of the sport", having made long-distance racing "a good paying business" by breeding and selling '500-milers' (*RP*, 1920 (39(1980):600)). Whilst the birds for sale in his catalogue were 'squeakers' (new-borns), the catalogue detailed the achievements and ancestors of the birds' *parents* (referred to in their 'pairs'), the 'value' of these young, unproven – and anonymised – pigeons inferred from their pedigree. This was also true, however, of a lot of adverts for older birds in *The Racing Pigeon*, which usually listed each bird's main achievements, followed by their pedigree (fig. 7.6).

List of Birds Mated for 1907.		
All Squeakers rung with R.P. Rings.		
Pair No. 1.		
75.	BLUE CHEQ. COCK, 1900.	1901, Weymouth, Jersey; 1902, Weymouth, Jersey, Nantes. Sire, pure 42-47, from brother and sister to 6498 and 6497; dam, pure Wegge. 75 is half brother to sire of Mr. T. Dolson's Nantes Combine winner, over 4,000 birds competing, and is sire of 1008, 7643, 4460, 3, 6072, 614 and 673. See 300.
570.	RED CHEQ. HEN, 1900.	1900, 1st Wellington, Worcester, Hereford, Swindon, Bath; 1901, Bournemouth, Jersey; 1902, Bournemouth, Jersey, 16th Nantes; 1903, Weymouth, La Roche; 1904, Nantes. Sire, Clay and Barker; dam, 26A and Vekeman. 570 and 542, sisters, arrived together from Nantes, L.W.H.S., while another brother, 569, was my 1st Sefton bird from Nantes, L.H.S., winning 7th prize, 1902. Dam of 4460, 6072, 614, 3, and 673, also own sister to dam of 1008 and 7643; 1906, Maremmes, N.F.C., being my 2nd bird up 7.23 next morning.
£2 10s. per squeaker.		
Pair No. 2.		
1008.	RED CHEQ. COCK, 1902.	1903, 8th Bath, Weymouth prize, Rennes; 1904, 2nd Worcester and 1st pool, 2nd and 3rd Jersey and 1st and 3rd pool, 1st and 4th Nantes; 1905, Maremmes, N.F.C.; 1906, Maremmes, N.F.C. winning a good sum in pools, being my first bird arriving 7.20 next a.m. Sire, 75; dam, 542. 542, own nest sister to 570. 1008, own brother to 7643, 1028 and 614. (See illustration.)
6498.	BLUE CHEQ. HEN, 1899.	1902, Nantes, since kept for stock. Sire, 53; dam, B. B. Wilkinson and Salsman. Own sister to Mr. W. G. Orchardson's 333, his first and only bird home same day from Bordeaux, 1900. 333 is sire of a Bordeaux bird, 1902. Sister to 6497 and 390. Parents of 44A and 7650A.
£2 per squeaker.		

Figure 7.5: Extract from Mr Thorougood's catalogue, 1907

Source: Thorougood (1907:7)

32.—Blue Pied Hen, HP014.8651.—Pure Delmotte, flown 100 miles. A splendid strong hen with bronze markings on wings. Sire, 4002, bred by Delmotte from Le Libourne 15, who was a prize-winner from Criel, Vendome, St. Mannance, Vierron, and St. Vincent, and is related to 1st prize Libourne and Electric. Dam, Blue, from his Mealy cock, from Bon Vieux Pale and a blue hen kept for stock. Pure Delmotte. No. 32 is a splendid hen, has bred us particularly speedy and reliable birds, and is as nice a Delmotte hen as we have seen. We can recommend these two hens to lovers of this famed strain.	Ha Da Wi Oh Ha of all za ha ve
33.—Blue Cheq. Hen, NURP20UF80.—Pure Delmotte; flown Malahide twice. Sire, Red Cheq. cock, 15676. Pure Delmotte, bred by Jno. Fleming; contains all the famous 975 and 612 blood, imported direct from M. Delmotte. Dam, No. 31, the good 11 flights hen.	Be ps bi bi N a
34.—Blue Cock, NURP20UF92.—Pure Delmotte. A real stormer. Sire, Blue Cheq. cock, Sire 52, from the direct pair 281 x 612, the famous E. A. Robinson Delmottes. Dam, B6, the old Darbyshire hen; strain, Old Electric. Dam, No. 32 this list, the well-known Pied hen. No. 34 is a grand young cock and his price is	3 2

Figure 7.6: Adverts selling birds in 'The Racing Pigeon', 1920

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1920 (39(1992):819)

Through close attention to pedigree, racers sought to “build up a strain that will give consistent results” (Osman, 1924:18). Strains were manufactured through generations of inbreeding, creating and standardising a distinct family or sub-type of birds related by ‘blood’, referred to as ‘pure’. Pigeon racers’ preoccupations with pedigree, then, echoed the work of eugenicists at the time, who, through their studies of genealogy, were concerned with “the problems of inheriting the past” as well as “the optimistic possibilities of planning future generations” (Bashford and Levine, 2010:10). Thus, like the fancy pigeon breeders already discussed, pigeon racers’ practices and views were similar to the motivations and language of eugenics, as racers sought to control and improve the breeding of ‘perfect’ athletes, supreme ‘races’ of birds.

The key to athleticism, then, racers believed, could be passed down through generations and standardised by close inbreeding. Despite being aware of the health threats posed by inbreeding, Osman (1910:33) explained, “the skilful breeder” knew “how much and how little to in-breed”. Each strain, however, initially began as a synthesis of other strains, athleticism pieced together by cross-breeding and then purified through inbreeding. What made a bird ‘pure’ was disputed, one racer appealing for a “standard of purity”, since “in advertisements birds are constantly described as pure so and so, with but the flimsiest claims to be anything of the sort” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1741):89)). The most accomplished strains, Wormald (1907) argued, could lay claim to the title of ‘dynasty’, his language perhaps echoing the pretentiousness associated with pedigree breeding. The most valued British strain, most racers agreed, was the Logan strain, although, as already identified, his birds were predominantly of Belgian origin.

According to John Day, founder of the London Columbarian Society, Belgian racing pigeons were imported into Britain in the 1850s due to their “superiority as fliers” and were used in the development of the British long-distance racing pigeon (*FW*, 1898 (18(446):34)). Day – who also kept fancy pigeons and was a member of the Pigeon Club, the NPS, and the USHC – had devoted considerable study to Belgian racing pigeons. “The foundations of English strains”, Osman (1924:20) claims, was “based almost entirely upon Belgian strains”. Due to the

high value placed upon Belgian strains, adverts for British birds often boasted their Belgian ancestry (fig. 7.7), *The Racing Pigeon* regularly featuring articles detailing Belgian pedigrees. Osman (1924) grouped Belgian birds – and, by association, their racers – into four geographical groups or ‘families’. He argued that the most well-known and highly-regarded Belgian pigeons in Britain belonged to the Verviers family, particularly those bred by Monsieur Alexandre Hansenne – in Osman’s opinion, “the greatest long-distance racer Belgium ever produced” (Osman, 1924:20) – from the late 1850s onwards (fig. 7.8). Verviers birds were reportedly physically very similar to Osman’s second family, the Liege birds, which included those bred by Monsieur Delrez. The Antwerp family of birds were, he claimed, much smaller. Amongst the best-known Antwerp racers was Monsieur Gits, one regular columnist stating that there was “no greater authority”, his birds “unapproachable” (*RP*, 1910 (24(1182):296)). Indeed, many of Logan’s best birds contained “Gits blood”, including the above-mentioned Old 86 (*RP*, 1898 (1(30):482)). Finally, the Brussels family birds were a cross between the Liege bird and the Antwerp bird. Racers from Brussels included Monsieur Grooters, whose “reputation...was grandly justified by the colossal successes gained by his champions”, one article wrote (*RP*, 1923 (42(2105):141)).

**PURE OLD BELGIAN
:: STRAINS. ::
GROOTERS, GITS,
BASTIN, DELREZ,
IMPORTED DIRECT.**



**B. C. COCK. w.f.
11. 18074.
Bred by JULES REMY.
NIMY-LEZ-MONS.
Imported 1913.
Parent G rooters.
A winner from Chateaufort
and Angoulême.
1st and Special Burslem Show, 1913.**

I shall have a limited number of Squeakers for sale in 1915,
at prices from **20s. to 60s.** per squeaker.

Breeding lists 3d. each, returned to purchasers.

In the two years the loft has been founded it has been 2nd highest prize
winner in the *Burslem* W.M.H.S. both seasons, and has been a winner of
first and other money prizes in N.S. Federation several times. The birds
can win on the road and in the pen.

**WARWICK SAVAGE,
Wellington House, BURSLEM.**

**Delrez'
Barcelona
Blood.**

Mr. J. Barton, of softe fame, has an well adver-
tised the birds he had of me (see "R.P." Nov. 30).
and I seem it useless to add more. His late
season, Mr. Barton, has also written me speak-
ing of the same blood from my loft. Last
year I won the longest race in which I took part.
I won the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62nd, 63rd, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82nd, 83rd, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th, 111th, 112th, 113th, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, 118th, 119th, 120th, 121st, 122nd, 123rd, 124th, 125th, 126th, 127th, 128th, 129th, 130th, 131st, 132nd, 133rd, 134th, 135th, 136th, 137th, 138th, 139th, 140th, 141st, 142nd, 143rd, 144th, 145th, 146th, 147th, 148th, 149th, 150th, 151st, 152nd, 153rd, 154th, 155th, 156th, 157th, 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587th, 588th, 589th, 590th, 591st, 592nd, 593rd, 594th, 595th, 596th, 597th, 598th, 599th, 600th, 601st, 602nd, 603rd, 604th, 605th, 606th, 607th, 608th, 609th, 610th, 611st, 612nd, 613th, 614th, 615th, 616th, 617th, 618th, 619th, 620th, 621st, 622nd, 623rd, 624th, 625th, 626th, 627th, 628th, 629th, 630th, 631st, 632nd, 633rd, 634th, 635th, 636th, 637th, 638th, 639th, 640th, 641st, 642nd, 643rd, 644th, 645th, 646th, 647th, 648th, 649th, 650th, 651st, 652nd, 653rd, 654th, 655th, 656th, 657th, 658th, 659th, 660th, 661st, 662nd, 663rd, 664th, 665th, 666th, 667th, 668th, 669th, 670th, 671st, 672nd, 673rd, 674th, 675th, 676th, 677th, 678th, 679th, 680th, 681st, 682nd, 683rd, 684th, 685th, 686th, 687th, 688th, 689th, 690th, 691st, 692nd, 693rd, 694th, 695th, 696th, 697th, 698th, 699th, 700th, 701st, 702nd, 703rd, 704th, 705th, 706th, 707th, 708th, 709th, 710th, 711st, 712nd, 713th, 714th, 715th, 716th, 717th, 718th, 719th, 720th, 721st, 722nd, 723rd, 724th, 725th, 726th, 727th, 728th, 729th, 730th, 731st, 732nd, 733rd, 734th, 735th, 736th, 737th, 738th, 739th, 740th, 741st, 742nd, 743rd, 744th, 745th, 746th, 747th, 748th, 749th, 750th, 751st, 752nd, 753rd, 754th, 755th, 756th, 757th, 758th, 759th, 760th, 761st, 762nd, 763rd, 764th, 765th, 766th, 767th, 768th, 769th, 770th, 771st, 772nd, 773rd, 774th, 775th, 776th, 777th, 778th, 779th, 780th, 781st, 782nd, 783rd, 784th, 785th, 786th, 787th, 788th, 789th, 790th, 791st, 792nd, 793rd, 794th, 795th, 796th, 797th, 798th, 799th, 800th, 801st, 802nd, 803rd, 804th, 805th, 806th, 807th, 808th, 809th, 810th, 811st, 812nd, 813th, 814th, 815th, 816th, 817th, 818th, 819th, 820th, 821st, 822nd, 823rd, 824th, 825th, 826th, 827th, 828th, 829th, 830th, 831st, 832nd, 833rd, 834th, 835th, 836th, 837th, 838th, 839th, 840th, 841st, 842nd, 843rd, 844th, 845th, 846th, 847th, 848th, 849th, 850th, 851st, 852nd, 853rd, 854th, 855th, 856th, 857th, 858th, 859th, 860th, 861st, 862nd, 863rd, 864th, 865th, 866th, 867th, 868th, 869th, 870th, 871st, 872nd, 873rd, 874th, 875th, 876th, 877th, 878th, 879th, 880th, 881st, 882nd, 883rd, 884th, 885th, 886th, 887th, 888th, 889th, 890th, 891st, 892nd, 893rd, 894th, 895th, 896th, 897th, 898th, 899th, 900th, 901st, 902nd, 903rd, 904th, 905th, 906th, 907th, 908th, 909th, 910th, 911st, 912nd, 913th, 914th, 915th, 916th, 917th, 918th, 919th, 920th, 921st, 922nd, 923rd, 924th, 925th, 926th, 927th, 928th, 929th, 930th, 931st, 932nd, 933rd, 934th, 935th, 936th, 937th, 938th, 939th, 940th, 941st, 942nd, 943rd, 944th, 945th, 946th, 947th, 948th, 949th, 950th, 951st, 952nd, 953rd, 954th, 955th, 956th, 957th, 958th, 959th, 960th, 961st, 962nd, 963rd, 964th, 965th, 966th, 967th, 968th, 969th, 970th, 971st, 972nd, 973rd, 974th, 975th, 976th, 977th, 978th, 979th, 980th, 981st, 982nd, 983rd, 984th, 985th, 986th, 987th, 988th, 989th, 990th, 991st, 992nd, 993rd, 994th, 995th, 996th, 997th, 998th, 999th, 1000th, 1001st, 1002nd, 1003rd, 1004th, 1005th, 1006th, 1007th, 1008th, 1009th, 1010th, 1011st, 1012nd, 1013th, 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1639th, 1640th, 1641st, 1642nd, 1643rd, 1644th, 1645th, 1646th, 1647th, 1648th, 1649th, 1650th, 1651st, 1652nd, 1653rd, 1654th, 1655th, 1656th, 1657th, 1658th, 1659th, 1660th, 1661st, 1662nd, 1663rd, 1664th, 1665th, 1666th, 1667th, 1668th, 1669th, 1670th, 1671st, 1672nd, 1673rd, 1674th, 1675th, 1676th, 1677th, 1678th, 1679th, 1680th, 1681st, 1682nd, 1683rd, 1684th, 1685th, 1686th, 1687th, 1688th, 1689th, 1690th, 1691st, 1692nd, 1693rd, 1694th, 1695th, 1696th, 1697th, 1698th, 1699th, 1700th, 1701st, 1702nd, 1703rd, 1704th, 1705th, 1706th, 1707th, 1708th, 1709th, 1710th, 1711st, 1712nd, 1713th, 1714th, 1715th, 1716th, 1717th, 1718th, 1719th, 1720th, 1721st, 1722nd, 1723rd, 1724th, 1725th, 1726th, 1727th, 1728th, 1729th, 1730th, 1731st, 1732nd, 1733rd, 1734th, 1735th, 1736th, 1737th, 1738th, 1739th, 1740th, 1741st, 1742nd, 1743rd, 1744th, 1745th, 1746th, 1747th, 1748th, 1749th, 1750th, 1751st, 1752nd, 1753rd, 1754th, 1755th, 1756th, 1757th, 1758th, 1759th, 1760th, 1761st, 1762nd, 1763rd, 1764th, 1765th, 1766th, 1767th, 1768th, 1769th, 1770th, 1771st, 1772nd, 1773rd, 1774th, 1775th, 1776th, 1777th, 1778th, 1779th, 1780th, 1781st, 1782nd, 1783rd, 1784th, 1785th, 1786th, 1787th, 1788th, 1789th, 1790th, 1791st, 1792nd, 1793rd, 1794th, 1795th, 1796th, 1797th, 1798th, 1799th, 1800th, 1801st, 1802nd, 1803rd, 1804th, 1805th, 1806th, 1807th, 1808th, 1809th, 1810th, 1811st, 1812nd, 1813th, 1814th, 1815th, 1816th, 1817th, 1818th, 1819th, 1820th, 1821st, 1822nd, 1823rd, 1824th, 1825th, 1826th, 1827th, 1828th, 1829th, 1830th, 1831st, 1832nd, 1833rd, 1834th, 1835th, 1836th, 1837th, 1838th, 1839th, 1840th, 1841st, 1842nd, 1843rd, 1844th, 1845th, 1846th, 1847th, 1848th, 1849th, 1850th, 1851st, 1852nd

fame”, Osman wrote, becoming physical embodiments of both athletic integrity and of their creators’ reputations (*RP*, 1925 (44(2242):785)). Thus, pedigrees defined both their feathered members and the racer who created them, inextricably connecting racers’ and pigeons’ identities.

Whilst the whole of a racer’s loft of birds was synonymous with their name, some individual birds were more closely linked with their creators. Picking out individual birds as representatives of a strain, placing them on a podium as examples, reaffirmed the imaginative athleticism constructed by pedigrees. Mr Thorouggood, for instance, Osman stated, would “always be coupled with his renowned stock hen 26A...the foundation of this loft” (*RP*, 1899 (2(52):228)). Indeed, the inside cover of Thorouggood’s (1907) catalogue illustrates this co-production of birds and racers, a photograph of 26A proudly displayed (fig. 7.9), idolised as the epitome of physical prowess, and used as a totem to symbolise the quality of his whole loft. Thorouggood himself (1907:5) described her as “the mother of my loft”, illustrating how closely related her successes were to his own reputation. Thus, both Mr Thorouggood and 26A were reconstituted by this relationship, their identities becoming entangled. The biographies of racing pigeons and their owners were, therefore, co-constituted.

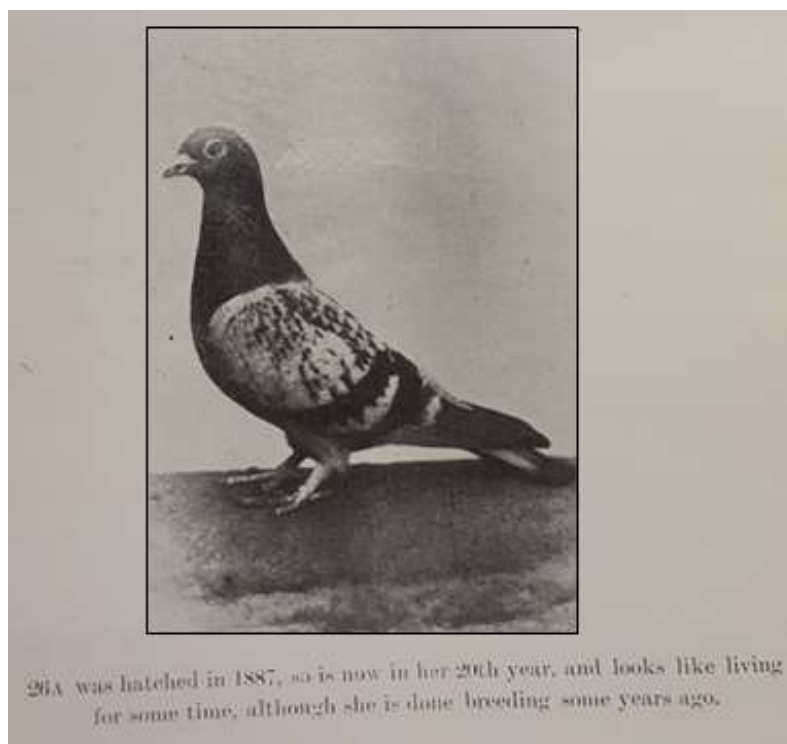


Figure 7.9: 26A

Source: Thorouggood (1907:inside cover)

Racers regularly emphasised their proficiency and ingenuity in judiciously breeding – and training (see Section 7.2) – birds. “That it requires skill on the part of the breeder to mate his birds to produce the champion”, Osman wrote, “there can be no gainsaying”, (*RP*, 1911 (26(1291):331)). Race results published in *The Racing Pigeon*, although perhaps not deliberately, contributed to this prioritisation of pigeon racers, results regularly listing the *racers’* names – rather than the birds’ ring numbers – next to the velocities (fig. 7.10). Results were published, it seems, as general ‘news’ or interest, having already been announced at the clubhouse after the race, and usually contained “not more than a few velocities below those of the winner” (Squills, 1912:14). The ‘value’ of the results was reinforced by the inclusion of details such as distance, weather, and number of competitors. The publication of results, therefore, constructed a partial narrative about the sport, emphasising human achievement.

<p>The Rossendale F. C. flew a race from Stafford on May 1, 1898, distance, sixty-two miles. Twenty members sent 131 birds, which were liberated by Mr. E. Howard, conveyer, at 6.45 o'clock. Wind south. In connection with Ramsbottom and District Federation, 1,229 birds belonging to seven clubs.—J. H. PROCTOR, <i>Hon. Sec.</i></p>			<p>Uddingston and Bothwell F. C. flew a race from Portpatrick on May 14, 1898, distance eighty-one miles; eleven members sent 117 birds, which were liberated by Mr. McJannet at 12.38 o'clock. Wind, north; weather, fine.—ROBERT WADDELL, <i>Hon. Sec.</i></p>				
Pickering	1751	Sutcliffe	1594	Johnston	1107	Clyde	1144
Proctor	1703	Ashworth	1551	Wise, jun.	1191	Hamilton	1135
Ashworth	1678	Mawdsley	1544	Gore	1178	Reid	1087
Ashworth	1675	Pickup	1524	Tennent	1162	Menzies	1046
Lupton	1665	Scholes	1524	Clarke	1151	Lothian	916
Forrester	1657	Ashworth	1515	<p>Workington Amateur H. S. flew first old bird race from Crewe on May 14, distance 117 miles; twenty-two members sent 154 birds, which were liberated by Mr. J. Lightfoot at 12.25 o'clock. Wind, slight east; fine.—JAS. V. ELLIS, <i>Hon. Sec.</i></p>			
Mawdsley	1637	Naylor	1279	<p>*Laybourne Bros. 861 Armstrong 856 Hewitt Bros. 853 Nicholson 853 Nicholson 851 Hope 832 Wildgoose 823 Valentine and Ellis (2) 804 Kearton and Furness 761 Fletcher 759 *Robinson and Weston 748 McClymont, W. 726 Iveson and Rumford 708 Foy 686 Rudkin 655 Kelly Bros. 649 Scott 636 Studholme 633 McClymont, G. 598 (First birds only.) Laybourne and Robinson and Weston win specials given by Valentine and Ellis</p>			
Pickering	1603	Worswick	1279				

<p>Macclesfield Temperance H.S. —The above Society held their first old bird race on May 7 from Worcester. Sixteen members sent 113 birds.—T. SLATER, <i>Hon. Sec.</i></p>			
Benson	1259	Adams	1206
Palfreyman	1257	Jones	1188
Holmes	1245	Sutton	1183
Coppock	1241	Bray	1174
Timperley	1234	Craghill	1171
Row-		Wall	1128
botham	1231	Brindley	1093
Ripley	1221	Roome	1070
<p>Second old bird race, Cheltenham, May 14. Sixteen members sent 112 birds.</p>			
Bray	1099	Ripley	1067
Holmes	1098	Sutton	998
Benson	1098	Jones	997
Coppock	1086	Rowbotham	986
Palfreyman	1083	Brindley	979
Craghill	1077	Slater	978
Timperley	1072	Wall	973

Figure 7.10: Example race results, 1898

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(5):80)

It was, it seems, quite common for racers to claim the credit for their birds' performances or, at least, their language certainly implied so. Adverts for birds often emphasised the collective achievements of the racer's 'loft', divorcing individual birds from their successes. An example can be seen in figure 7.11, an advert for birds that reads as if the racer himself had flown the races: "in 1913 I took 49th Open Race" (*Squills Diary*, 1915:53). The advert used very practical and evidence-based language to imply a well looked-after, ordered, and organised loft, stating: "no old worn-out stock birds kept here". Similar rhetoric was used in most adverts selling birds, adverts usually specifying birds' performances and pedigree in brief, rather than the passionate and enthusiastic description used in letters and articles. The photograph accompanying the advert in figure 7.11 noticeably contains none of the racer's birds. This was not uncommon, other adverts alternatively including photographs of the *parents* of the birds for sale (see figures 7.7 and 7.8), suggesting the importance of pedigree and performance over visual appearance. As this chapter exposes, however, it was hard to make such distinctions.

GLOUCESTER ROAD LOFTS, KEW.
SQUEAKERS FOR SALE, 1915.
Correspondence Invited.

NO OLD WORN-OUT STOCK BIRDS KEPT HERE.

Four home out of 6 sent to Bordeaux, 1914, National Flying Club.
 My first bird 1914 timed in 12.11 day following liberation—a yearling. His
 Sire, my fourth home. My bird was about the 6th or 7th into London.

In 1913 I took 49th Open Prize, 1123 birds competing. Three out of four
 from Marennes, Richmond and Twickenham Club, about 400 miles. From
 Rennes, 241 miles, in the same Club, I had 13 out of 15 sent, taking about 6th
 position and had 8 birds in the Loft in 6½ hours from time of liberation.

North Road, 1914, every stage to Lerwick, including the Aberdeen smash,
 Lerwick 601 miles, first time sending.

No Better or Finer Collection of Birds in England.



ADDRESS :
J. MARSHALL,
HOMER LODGE, GLOUCESTER ROAD, KEW.

Figure 7.11: Advert selling racing pigeons, 1915

Source: *Squills Diary* (1915:53)

7.1.3 Famous or Forgotten

Birds that were consistently successful were labelled 'champions' or 'aces'. However, the term 'champion' was, racers worried, over-used and a lack of consensus as to its definition almost devalued its use. Books and the pigeon press identified 'famous' pigeons, framing them as 'celebrities'. Barker (1913:177), for instance, in a chapter entitled 'How to Breed 'A Champion'', listed forty successful birds – including two Osmans and two Logans – which, he claimed, had "helped to make pigeon history". Ogdens (1931) cigarette cards also portrayed some birds as avian superstars to its non-racing audience, almost like football trading cards depicting famous players. Over two-fifths (42%) of the series featured specific individuals singled out for their accomplishments, the details on the back summarising their racing careers and pedigree (fig. 7.12).



Figure 7.12: Specific pigeons featured on Ogdens' cigarette cards, 1931

Source: Ogdens (1931) *Racing Pigeons*, No. 3 & 10

Due to the desire for impressive pedigrees and pure strains, however, the majority of racing pigeons were, in fact, *excluded* from these stories, birds only appearing in books or the pigeon press because of their famous relatives, their own successes, or their illustrious owners. The stories told, then, only represented the minority of birds; of the others – those with little-known owners, less significant achievements, or modest pedigrees – little can be known from these sources.

At the other end of the spectrum to ‘champions’ were ‘failures’, birds who did not achieve what was expected of them. Individual ‘failures’ were rarely mentioned in *The Racing Pigeon*, although racers frequently debated what to do about underachieving pigeons. The birds themselves were, interestingly, rarely blamed for their poor performances, the responsibility taken by their owners. “In the majority of such cases”, a regular columnist stated, “the trouble rests with the breaking of the most elementary rules in connection with breeding and conditioning”, the owner’s “own blindness to the errors of their management” (*RP*, 1905 (15(713):956)). Debates about what constituted an athletic pigeon, then, were also discussions about what made a good pigeon racer.

Racers’ selective breeding not only meant that birds were carefully selected for mating; they were also selected for ‘disposal’ (fig. 7.13). Pigeon racers were pragmatic, limiting the number of birds in their loft for financial and practical reasons, and also to safeguard their birds’ health. One columnist warned:

“overcrowding is always dangerous, resulting as it frequently does in a vitiated atmosphere, uncleanliness, fouled grain and water, and inevitable discomfort to the birds” (*RP*, 1918 (37 (1878):307)).

Like Darwin’s Malthusian theory of competition, then, the loft had a carrying-capacity, a point of equilibrium at which any further increase in population would harm the birds. As a result, most pigeon racers practised periodical ‘weeding out’, or “the elimination of rubbish”, as one racer put it (*RP*, 1923 (46(2340):726)). They were very open about this, discussing the best means of selecting birds to cull, based on careful consideration of pedigree, training performances, race results, moulting patterns, and general temperament. The methods used for killing birds, however, remained implicit.

PAIR NO. 5		MATED 18 TH MAR. STRAIN, & WHITTE (C. JACKSON)	
C	NURP. 36. WMS	MALE	BLUE COCK (C. JACKSON) NURP 35 WMS 178 (LATE BREED)
	BLUE CHEG C (KILLED OFF. (LATE BREED))	FEMALE	BLUE CHEG HEN (FROM REF "A")
H	NURP. 32. ED. 2897	MALE	RED COCK (WHITTLE) NURP 34. ED. 1845 (REF "E")
	MEALY HEN (KILLED OFF. (LATE BREED))	FEMALE	GRIZZLE HEN (WHITTLE) NURP. 34. ED. 1843

Figure 7.13: Extract from a stud book showing birds 'killed off', 1938

Source: *Squills Diary* (1938:80)

Weeding out risked “throwing away many a golden egg”, one columnist warned (*RP*, 1904 (13(608):325)). The number of birds chosen for weeding out depended on each racer’s circumstances, how many they could afford to feed, ring, and race, and how many they could house in their limited space. Interestingly, in selecting birds that were “worth their perch” the all-important notion of pedigree became a secondary concern (*FW*, 1908 (39(1009):632)). Osman admitted:

“no matter to what length the pedigree of a bird runs there should be a merciless screwing of necks if they show the least symptoms of weakness when youngsters” (*RP*, 1899 (3(99):432)).

He argued that it was kinder to kill weak birds than to send them to races ill-equipped. The language used by racers – ‘weeding out’, ‘dispose’, ‘weakness’, ‘surplus’ – implied a ruthless and pragmatic approach to breeding, Logan (1924:18) confessing:

“I...use them, as instruments for the end...all I do with them is subservient...I subject them rigidly to the doctrine of the ‘survival of the

fittest' ...to stamp out weakness of constitution by killing every ailing bird".

The term 'survival of the fittest' – originally used in the 1860s by Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer – was often used by racers to describe the ways in which races 'naturally' weeded out birds. The season's competitions, they believed, helped eliminate the weakest birds "in a far more effectual manner than he [the racer] could have done", one columnist wrote (*RP*, 1904 (13(608):324)), whilst another admitted that "many of our smashes will prove themselves blessings in disguise" (*RP*, 1905 (15(700):120)). Races were, then, from the practical racer's point of view, almost like a Malthusian 'positive check' on the population of a loft. However, like a farmer with his livestock, this did not necessarily mean that the birds were disregarded as living subjects, nor that racers were happy to kill their birds. *The Feathered World's* racing correspondent explained that most racers – whether out of optimism or compassion – always looked for "that faint spark of tenacity which causes us to risk it just another season", excuses for "keeping the duffers" (*FW*, 1908 (39(1009):633)). Indeed, as this chapter will show, there is evidence to suggest that racers felt compassion for their birds. Racers cared for their birds, investing a lot of time and money into them. There was, therefore, a paradox between care and slaughter central to pigeon racing, racers simultaneously demonstrating careful attention and harsh insensitivity.

7.2 Embodying Athleticism

With the outcomes of even the most closely-monitored breeding still partially unpredictable, it is, perhaps, not surprising that racers also looked for visual markers denoting a pigeon's racing ability. It was important to pigeon racers that their birds were physically fit, resilient, dependable, and tough, perhaps a reflection of their own moral and physical expectations (Ditcher, 1991; Johnes, 2007). They agreed that fitness or athleticism was "an exceedingly difficult quantity to reduce to paper" (*RP*, 1916 (35(1736):8)), admitting that some birds simply had "that indefinable look of intelligence so noticeable in a good bird" (*RP*, 1918 (37(1858):140)). One editorial explained:

"a fit pigeons is as different to the unfit pigeon as chalk is to cheese. You see the unfit bird dull in colour, listless in eye, feathers up on end like a

porcupine, standing moping about in the loft...Now picture the fit pigeon. Sleek feathers, tight in vent, dry and firm in flesh, with flashing eyes like diamonds...like a terrier looking for another to fight...in fighting form” (RP, 1922 (41(2060):259)).

The visual was, therefore, prominent in racers’ judgements of a bird’s fitness, although most were aware that a bird may *appear* fit but not be “sufficiently physically sound to stand the fatigue of tiring journeys or very long distance races” (RP, 1916 (35(1753):236)). Health and fitness were largely invisible to racers, internal states not always accompanied by visible signs. Furthermore, whilst some external features made pigeons physically fit to race, others were merely ornamental, the distinction between the two regularly distorted.

7.2.1 A Racing Pigeon’s Composition

“Success in long-distance racing”, Osman (1910:149) wrote, “depends upon the physique of the birds”. Each racer had different definitions of the best conformation for a racing bird, although generally agreed on some basic functional characteristics. The body of these feathered athletes was highly valued by racers, who regularly described them as machine-like. Barker (1913:46), for instance, used a steam engine metaphor:

“in the pigeon’s body the food taken is burnt up within the system, producing heat and force which set in action the muscles moving the various parts of the body...carbon and hydrogen are burnt up, producing heat and energy”.

The machine metaphor suggested that pigeons’ bodies were disciplined, manipulated, and yet powerful. The size of racing pigeons was heavily disputed, some arguing that “a big, powerful bird is more suitable for battling against a head wind than a smaller one”, whilst others claimed that “a small bird may be as powerful in proportion to its size as a big one” (RP, 1916 (35(1778):524)). Size was, therefore, about proportion and equilibrium, making birds balanced and buoyant in the air. The average racing pigeon reportedly weighed 16oz. (1lb) and was ‘medium-sized’ (Cope Bros., 1926, No.17). Racers, nonetheless, agreed that successful birds came in all shapes and sizes.

Some racers believed that the physiology of pigeons' bodies – particularly size – was, to some extent, dictated by the geography of their flight routes one racer stating: “the harder the route the smaller the pigeon” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1763):370)). They therefore recognised the potential for environmental influences to affect their birds' abilities. A regular columnist in *The Racing Pigeon*, for instance, described Scottish racing pigeons as: “light and airy, free and easy, and amazingly strong *little* pigeon[s]...little monkeys” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1763):353)). Whilst seeming like a clichéd analysis of Scottish hardiness, he framed his argument geographically. “The hard finish and difficult course for the Scotch birds keeps their size down”, he claimed, making Scottish birds smaller and stronger than English birds (*RP*, 1916 (35(1763):354)). Whilst not all racers agreed, another suggested that pigeon size was geographically graduated:

“Yorkshire and up North are not inclined to grow a big pigeon, but one on the small side. Lancashire and Cheshire produce a good medium sized bird...It is in the Midlands and further South where good sized birds...may be found...Transplant these birds to the far North, and in a couple of seasons they will have shrunk perceptibly” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1763):370)).

A further characteristic of the racing pigeon that attracted a lot of attention was their feathers. Whilst the feathers could make birds look “handsome”, racers also believed that they revealed a bird's health (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1913:34). “Abundance of feather...of a rich texture with the sheen of silk and bloom...[was] synonymous with health”, one racer explained, but was often mistaken for signs of fitness (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1913:4). This bloom was also functional, providing an oiliness that helped birds through rain and fog (Logan, 1924). Racers emphasised the importance of ‘full’ wings and, as a result, the moulting season (September-December) was “a period during which racing pigeons require[d] the utmost care...by far the most important portion of the year” (Barker, 1913:147). Many racers studied the moult of their birds very carefully, knowing the exact order that individual ‘flights’ (wing feathers) would be shed, and tried to delay the moult by regulating temperature, ventilation, diet, and mating. There was a “subtle connection between the growth of feathers and a bird's general health”, one columnist in *The Racing Pigeon* wrote (*RP*, 1908 (21(1023):334)), an incomplete moult causing deterioration of health and

strength due to the strain on blood supply when renewing feathers (Osman, 1910). The feathers of a racing pigeon, then, were important to health and athletic ability, as well as having an ornamental function.

One regular contributor to *The Racing Pigeon* argued that racers were “not nearly so accurate or so scientific” due to aesthetic preferences for, amongst other “fallacies”, certain feather colours, head shapes, and eye colours (*RP*, 1904 (12(563):490)). The abovementioned contested practice of colour breeding, for instance, blurred the distinction between aesthetics and athleticism. A similar aesthetic theory was the theory of eye colour – or ‘the study of eyes’ – white or pearl eyes supposedly making birds weaker. This theory was particularly popular in Belgium, one Belgian racer explaining: “the eye is considered the mirror of the soul...that authentic seal of the strain...the document in which genealogy of a subject is found written (*RP*, 1923 (42(2100):27)). A lot of British racers were, however, sceptical, one editorial stating: “we all like a good eye...but we have seen birds with eyes of various colours equally successful as racers” (*RP*, 1923 (42(2102):68)). It was, nevertheless, important to most racers that a bird’s eye looked “scintillating and brilliant”, a “metallic glitter” being a sign of healthiness and exuberance (*RP*, 1923 (41(2100):27)).

A further example that conflated appearance and ability was, what some racers called, the ‘bump of locality’, a prominent forehead supposedly indicating a larger brain and, thus, intelligence. Good racing pigeons, some believed, required a “nicely curved skull, showing capacity for brain-holding” (*RP*, 1904 (13(612):397)). There were, then, parallels between this theory and the categorisation of humans in phrenology, a popular and contentious movement in both the scientific and public domains in the nineteenth century (Parssinen, 1974; DeMello, 2012). Victorian science, Boyd and McWilliam (2007) state, had a broad scope, encompassing geology and biology on the one hand, and mesmerism and phrenology on the other. The basis of phrenology, Parssinen (1974:2) explains, was “the belief that psychological characteristics of an individual are determined by the size and proportion of controlling organs in the brain”, denoted by the shape of the skull. This was, he adds, “the latest manifestation in a long-established popular tradition predicated on the assumption that an individual’s character could be divined from his physical features” (Parssinen, 1974:7). Phrenology faced strong criticism during the mid-nineteenth century,

but, nonetheless, still informed public debate – and, indeed, pigeon racers – in the early twentieth century, later being used to “determine criminality in people as well as to justify racial superiority and oppression” (DeMello, 2012:247). This fascination with *human* appearances, then, was translated into pigeon racing practice, although one columnist in *The Racing Pigeon* in 1905 wrote:

“I am surprised in these days when, in the minds of the educated public, phrenology has gone the way of witchcraft, crystal gazing, etc., that such a number of persons should still think that the size, shape, and contour of a pigeon’s head should be a reliable index to the size and quality of its brains” (*RP*, 1905 (14(642):5)).

Separating aesthetic and athletic motivations in racing pigeon breeding was, therefore, challenging.

7.2.2 Conditioning Racing Pigeons

“The success of an athlete”, Osman wrote, “depends entirely upon two considerations...his capability of performing the feat undertaken...and...the preparation necessary to get himself into such a condition” (*RP*, 1899 (2(50):195)). This description of *human* athleticism was, he believed, equally applicable to racing pigeons. The physical and mental preparation of pigeons, racers argued, brought them to a perfect state of health and fitness referred to as ‘condition’. Condition was both a visible and tangible aesthetic. As well as the sheen of feathers and vivacity of eyes, racers judged condition based on their birds’ movement in flight and feeling when handled. “If in proper condition”, an editorial wrote, “the bird will have a sort of propensity to slip through the hands, the head up and eyes looking out for a chance to be off” (*RP*, 1899 (2(49):179)).

Condition was, to a great extent, the result of careful preparation, care, and training, racers regularly emphasising their importance as “the master hand” in cultivating athletic birds (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1915:13). Achieving condition was a challenge, making racing successes all the more rewarding and reputation-enhancing for racers. One of the most commonly mentioned factors affecting condition was diet, each racer using their own preferred seasonal combinations of peas, tares, beans, maize, and barley. Food manufacturers also

sold ready-made nutritious mixtures. An advert for Pictor's 'Keepfit Mixture' (fig. 7.14) in *The Racing Pigeon* in 1930, for instance, emphasised the onus on pigeon racers to choose the correct food for their birds, suggesting that Pictor's food would 'stoke the engines' of their feathered athletes and ensure success. An advert for Hindhaughs' food (fig. 7.15) in 1938 drew, instead, on the glory of winning races. It played on racers' desire for their birds to take "the straight way" when flying home, suggesting their products were a sure route to success (*RP*, 1938 (67(2890):172)). The image of the sun shining on their corn "like silver" encouraged racers to connect Hindhaughs' food to money won by their birds, and the advert correspondingly offered prizes in certain races for racers who bought their products (*RP*, 1938 (67(2890):172)). The advert also, however, noted other requirements for conditioning racing pigeons: "plenty of exercise, cleanliness, clean water, clean food, fresh air" (*RP*, 1938 (67(2890):172)). These examples, then, show how adverts for pigeon products reflected the practices and philosophies behind pigeon racing.

SPRING IS COMING



True, it does not feel like it, but nevertheless, it is coming and with it will come the usual racing events. Are your birds ready? Are you doing your share now to make them win then? Are you stoking their engines with the best fuel? In a word are you feeding them right? Are you giving them

PICTOR

KEEPFIT MIXTURE

Keepfit is a well-balanced feed. It is just the best feed we know, and we have 70 years' experience behind us.

5/7	22/-
PER 25 LB. BAGS.	PER CWT.
DELIVERED FREE.	DELIVERED FREE.

PICTOR FED BIRDS DO WIN

PICTOR

PURE PIGEON FOODS

LONDON FANCIERS can obtain PICTOR FOODS from
MESSRS. ANDREWS & SONS, 171, FRANCIS ROAD, LEYTON, E.15.

ANDREWS & CO. (CEREALS) LTD., WORSLEY ST. MILLS, SALFORD, MANCHESTER

Figure 7.14: Advert for Pictor's food, 1938

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1930 (51(2471):ix)

THE RACING PIGEON

The Straight Way to Success!



★

● PLENTY OF EXERCISE

● CLEANLINESS

● CLEAN WATER

● CLEAN FOOD

● FRESH AIR



PRICE LIST.

In 1-cwt. bags

SILVERSHINE (Regd.) PIGEON CORN	34/-
No. 1 SPECIAL PIGEON CORN	31/-
PANTRY PIGEON CORN	28/-
TWENTYFIVE MIXTURE	28/-
DOTTER MIXTURE	17/-
STAR PIGEON CORN	17/-
PANTRY STAR PIGEON CORN	16/-
MOLTIMIX MIXTURE	16/-
SCOTCH MIXTURE	16/-
NEWCASTLE MIXTURE	16/-
GOLDEN MAPLES (Regd.)	31/-
TASMANIAN "A" GRADE MAPLES (Patented)	29/-
POLISHED NEW ZEALAND MAPLES No. 1	18/-
POLISHED ENG. MAPLES	18/-
POLISHED NEW TIC BEANS	18/-
POLISHED OLD TIC BEANS	18/-
LARGE TARES	17/-
Small Tares	17/-
Quota for the above, for 4 parts, or more, rebate 1/- per cwt.	
ARGENTINE CING. MAJES	17/-
WHITE AUSTRALIAN WHEAT	14/-
PIGEON BARLEY (Regd. and Opt.)	13/-
LARGE SCREENED LINSEED (Medicinal)	3/- per stone
COLZA SEED	3/- per 7-lb., 4/- per stone
CRACKS	2/- per stone

Carriage Paid if sent with other Co.
All prices are Carriage Paid and packed in new 1-cwt. bags.

PRIZE LIST.

45	Ayrshire Federation	Guernsey
45	Burrow Amalgamation	Guernsey
45.10	Burton Derby & District	Guernsey
45.15	"	Guernsey
45	Burrow Federation	Guernsey
45	Darwent Valley Federation	Guernsey
45	Derbyshire Federation	Guernsey
45	Doncaster & District Federation	Guernsey
45	"	Guernsey
45	East Cumberland Federation	Guernsey
45	East of Scotland Combine	Guernsey
45	Great Yorkshire Amalgamation	Guernsey
45	Glamorgan Road Federation	Guernsey
45	Great Yorkshire Federation	Guernsey
45	Heavy Woolsies District Fed.	Guernsey
45	Hampshire & District Fed.	Guernsey
45	Lake District Federation	Guernsey
45	Lancashire Federation	Guernsey
45	Lancashire Social Circle	Guernsey
45	Midland Counties Combine	Guernsey
45	New North Road Federation	Guernsey
45	North Road Championship Club	Guernsey
45	Ranfurlyshire Federation	Guernsey
45	South Derbyshire Federation	Guernsey
45	Scottish National Flying Club	Guernsey
45	Up Northern Combine	Guernsey
45	Welsh North Road Federation	Guernsey
45	West Cumberland Federation	Guernsey
45	West Coast Federation	Guernsey
45	Welsh National Flying Club	Guernsey
45	Welsh Championship Club	Guernsey
45	Yorkshire Federation	Guernsey

CONDITIONS.

1. The purchase of at least one cwt. since 1st July, 1937, of the following Hindhaugh's Specialities:-
 Golden Maples (Regd.), No. 1 Special Pigeon Corn, Twentynine Mixture (Regd.), Twentyfive Mixture (Regd.), Star Mixture, Polished Tasmanian "A" Grade Maples, Golden Maples, Polished New Zealand Maples, Polished English Maples, Polished Old Tares, Polished Large Tares, Polished Small Tares.

2. Receipt showing this purchase to be forwarded to Hindhaugh's Ltd., together with half crown and address, and note which gives the amount desired to compete.

3. These particulars and the receipt to be in Hindhaugh's Ltd. hands SEVEN DAYS PRIOR to the sale. All entries will be acknowledged within 3 days, failing which competition will be void.

4. One entry for one Special. Free can be accepted with purchase for only 1 cwt. of the most value purchase of 1 cwt. or more for each prize.

5. Should any dispute arise relative to any matter or thing relative to the interpretation or observance of any of the said conditions the decision of Hindhaugh's Ltd. shall be absolutely final and binding.



HINDHAUGH'S

NEWCASTLE • ON • TYNE

Figure 7.15: Advert for Hindhaugh's food, 1938
 Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1938 (67(2890):172)

Dietary supplements such as grit, salt blocks, and 'natural' tonics were also used by pigeon racers to keep their birds healthy. Liverine was one of the most commonly advertised health supplement companies in *The Racing Pigeon*, their adverts in 1935 using a series of cartoons speaking on behalf of the pigeons to suggest what they wanted (fig. 7.16). In contrast to the machine-like metaphors that some racers used, these adverts framed pigeons as living creatures, drawing on the fragility of their health and reliance on their racers' care. They also exploited real-life concerns, such as the importance of hygiene and health, the adverts simultaneously mirroring racers' practices and shaping them by creating a need for their products.



Figure 7.16: Adverts for Liverine products, 1935

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1935 (61(2739):222); (61(2746):vi); (61(2756):160)

On the other hand, an article in the *Homing Pigeon Annual* (1910:52) suggested that some racers used manufactured drugs – “the mysterious ‘red bottle’” – to fraudulently enhance their birds’ performances. It is not clear how widespread this practice was – it was not mentioned in any of the other sources consulted – but the article warned that stimulants made birds “more tired and exhausted...nerves and muscles...relaxed, the body...not in a fit state to resist cold...the senses...less acute” (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1910:52).

A final tool in the racer’s toolbox was the range of appliances available to care for their birds, enabling them to construct and maintain athletic birds in racing

condition (fig. 7.17). Some appliances were used to ensure hygiene and comfort, such as baths, nest pans, scrapers, and food and water hoppers; whilst others regulated birds' spatial use of the loft or their behaviour – helping with breeding, training, and catching birds – such as nest boxes, perches, breeding boxes, cages, fake eggs, traps (entrances to lofts), nets, and wing locks.

Jackson's Appliances are Best.

2D. IN THE 1s OFF THESE PRICES FOR A SHORT TIME ONLY DURING REMAINDER OF SALE.



METAL MARKING RINGS FOR 1909
are non-corrosive, light in weight, and low in price. As this, or any other letters:—
A 1909, 1 to 1000—1000, 48s.; 500, 24s.; 100, 5s.; 50, 2s. 6d.; 25, 1s. 4d.; 12, 10d.
A & B 1909, 1 to 1000—1000, 50s.; 500, 25s.; 100, 10s.; 50, 7s.; 25, 4s. 8d.; 12, 1s.
A B C 1909, 1 to 1000—1000, 67s.; 500, 34s.; 100, 17s.; 50, 9s. 6d.; 25, 1s. 8d.; 12, 1s.
Hinge sent out January 10th, 1909.



Zinc Corn Sieves, for cleaning corn. Nothing better. 2/- each.



Basting Wires, brass tube tops, best out. 7in. long, 2/- doz.; 8in. long, 2/3 with basting.



Handy Strongest Wood Hoppers for side of loft, 18in. wide, 20 x 2ft. 3/6; 2 ft. 6in., 4/6.



Maringor Shave Pans, best quality, 3/3 as this. Quantities hired out.



Wing Locks for young pouters, 6d. each, post free.



Cheap Galvanised Baths, 16in. wide, 1/2; 22in. wide, 2/0.



Advanced Baths, best quality, round, 16in. across x 4 deep, 2/6; 24in. across x 6 deep, 3/6.



Net Catchers for catching birds out of reach of hand. 2/6 each.



Victor Zinc Fountain and Hopper, to hold nearly 5 quarts, 3/- each.



Self-acting Wood Hopper, Healthy Ground. 4/3 each.



Homing Stud Book, best out, 1/6, 2/6, and 4/- post free.



Vulcanite Asphalt Roofing, Strongest made, 45ft. by 30in. wide, two qualities, 1/6 or 2/- per roll.



Pot Eggs, 1/- per doz., post free.



Perfect Pigeon Feeder, 16in. diameter, 1/-; 24in. diameter, 2/-; 36in. diameter, 3/-; 48in. diameter, 4/-; 60in. diameter, 5/-; 72in. diameter, 6/-; 84in. diameter, 7/-; 96in. diameter, 8/-; 108in. diameter, 9/-; 120in. diameter, 10/-; 132in. diameter, 11/-; 144in. diameter, 12/-; 156in. diameter, 13/-; 168in. diameter, 14/-; 180in. diameter, 15/-; 192in. diameter, 16/-; 204in. diameter, 17/-; 216in. diameter, 18/-; 228in. diameter, 19/-; 240in. diameter, 20/-; 252in. diameter, 21/-; 264in. diameter, 22/-; 276in. diameter, 23/-; 288in. diameter, 24/-; 300in. diameter, 25/-; 312in. diameter, 26/-; 324in. diameter, 27/-; 336in. diameter, 28/-; 348in. diameter, 29/-; 360in. diameter, 30/-; 372in. diameter, 31/-; 384in. diameter, 32/-; 396in. diameter, 33/-; 408in. diameter, 34/-; 420in. diameter, 35/-; 432in. diameter, 36/-; 444in. diameter, 37/-; 456in. diameter, 38/-; 468in. diameter, 39/-; 480in. diameter, 40/-; 492in. diameter, 41/-; 504in. diameter, 42/-; 516in. diameter, 43/-; 528in. diameter, 44/-; 540in. diameter, 45/-; 552in. diameter, 46/-; 564in. diameter, 47/-; 576in. diameter, 48/-; 588in. diameter, 49/-; 600in. diameter, 50/-; 612in. diameter, 51/-; 624in. diameter, 52/-; 636in. diameter, 53/-; 648in. diameter, 54/-; 660in. diameter, 55/-; 672in. diameter, 56/-; 684in. diameter, 57/-; 696in. diameter, 58/-; 708in. diameter, 59/-; 720in. diameter, 60/-; 732in. diameter, 61/-; 744in. diameter, 62/-; 756in. diameter, 63/-; 768in. diameter, 64/-; 780in. diameter, 65/-; 792in. diameter, 66/-; 804in. diameter, 67/-; 816in. diameter, 68/-; 828in. diameter, 69/-; 840in. diameter, 70/-; 852in. diameter, 71/-; 864in. diameter, 72/-; 876in. diameter, 73/-; 888in. diameter, 74/-; 900in. diameter, 75/-; 912in. diameter, 76/-; 924in. diameter, 77/-; 936in. diameter, 78/-; 948in. diameter, 79/-; 960in. diameter, 80/-; 972in. diameter, 81/-; 984in. diameter, 82/-; 996in. diameter, 83/-; 1008in. diameter, 84/-; 1020in. diameter, 85/-; 1032in. diameter, 86/-; 1044in. diameter, 87/-; 1056in. diameter, 88/-; 1068in. diameter, 89/-; 1080in. diameter, 90/-; 1092in. diameter, 91/-; 1104in. diameter, 92/-; 1116in. diameter, 93/-; 1128in. diameter, 94/-; 1140in. diameter, 95/-; 1152in. diameter, 96/-; 1164in. diameter, 97/-; 1176in. diameter, 98/-; 1188in. diameter, 99/-; 1200in. diameter, 100/-.



Tate's Sugar Box Nest, Wood frame, wire down front, best quality, 1/6 each.



A few tons of best pure shining Pigeon Grit, 4/- per cwt.



3 cornered Left-entrance, 1/6 each, post free. 4ft. long, 2/-.

ONLY FROM

JACKSON & PIMLOTT,

THE PREMIER FIRM FOR HOMING REQUISITES,

26, Blackfriars Bridge, Manchester.

Figure 7.17: An advert for pigeon appliances, 1909

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1909 (22(1061):29)

In conditioning birds, pigeon racers reportedly paid “close attention...[to] the different peculiarities of each subject” (*RP*, 1899 (2(47):154)), “study[ing] the individual points of excellence in each bird” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1765):375)). One columnist explained:

“the true management of pigeons is the correct management of the individual pigeon...regarding and treating each bird in the loft as a separate individual, and not simply as one of a mob...the absolute recognition of a bird as a sentient being, with its very own little idiosyncrasies, its strong points and its weak ones, its like and dislikes, its faults and failings, its virtues and, maybe, its vices” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2340):726)).

The loft was, one racer described, a “well ordered...army of pigeons”, trained, disciplined, and led by their racer, who knew which birds were most suited “for one form of attack and which for another” (*RP*, 1910 (24(1163):5)). An Ogdens (1931, No.46) cigarette card added that different birds were suited to different races, “just as there are courses over which racehorses are at their best, and distances at which the athlete excels”. Thus, whilst the birds were part of a collective, their individuality was imperative. As a result, racers monitored individual birds, learning to understand “all their little kinks” (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1910:52). This involved a close relationship with the birds, spending lots of time “amongst the pigeons” and gaining their trust (*RP*, 1916 (35(1765):375)).

In individualising birds, racers devised systems to distinguish them. The majority of racing pigeons were referred to either by their unique ring numbers, the year they were born (e.g. Old 86), or by a number assigned to them in the loft (e.g. 26A). Some birds, however, were given names, ambiguous acts of compassion that contrasted with the brutal pragmatism of breeding and training. Some simply had pet names, named from birth, examples including ‘Old Billy’, ‘Albert’, ‘Teddy’, ‘Spearmint’, ‘Mumpy’, and ‘Primrose’. Others were given descriptive names reflecting either existing or desired racing attributes, such as ‘Gallant’, ‘La Concorde’, ‘Gold Finder’, ‘Iron Duchess’, ‘Sensible’, ‘Finisher’, ‘Reliance’, ‘Consistence’, ‘Savage’, and ‘The Rapid’. On the other hand, some racing pigeons *earnt* their names after successful performances, named after the locations of races, such as ‘The Pons Cock’, ‘Rome I’, ‘La Rochelle’, ‘Cheltenham’, and

'Wanstead Wonder'. Their identities were, therefore, performative, their achievements defining their athleticism. Others, still, were given more sentimental, meaningful names, with stories behind them. A bird sired by Osman's Old Billy, for instance, gained his name – 'Mortification' – after a race from Scotland in 1892. During the race he was badly shot, suffering from mortification (gangrene), but Osman reportedly nursed him back to health, against the odds, for the next racing season. Thus, whilst pigeon racers often had ruthlessly practical approaches to managing their working birds, they also, in contrast, regularly demonstrated care and affection towards racing pigeons.

7.2.3 Training Racing Pigeons

Racers regularly emphasised the importance of training in 'improving' birds, preparing them for races, and helping racers choose which birds to race. There was, they claimed, a lot of skill and knowledge needed in order to train birds well, which one racer referred to as "the art of the pigeon breeder and the sporting manager" (*RP*, 1933 (58(2666):394)). This reinforced the importance of humans in the relationship, devaluing the pigeons' physical and mental capabilities. "The object of training", one columnist wrote, "is to bring birds into what we know as 'condition' ...a sort of 'super fitness' of all the organs of the body" (*RP*, 1933 (57(2638):276)). He continued:

"surplus fat and all waste material must be removed, and the muscles must be tuned up...you must have good health as a solid foundation upon which to build your edifice of fitness...we have not only to train our birds in a physical sense, but have also to train them mentally" (*RP*, 1933 (57(2638):276)).

Training was, therefore, a biopolitical project, a process by which racers could 'build' athletic birds, physically and mentally, and exert control over their 'condition'. It can also be argued, however, that training tosses gave the racers themselves self-confidence, legitimising their hard-work, methods, and risks. Training began when birds were 2-3 months old and involved, as explained, successive 'tosses' over increasing distances (Tegetmeier, 1871). Racers always flew their birds in the same direction, claiming that it confused them to fly both north and south road. The tosses took place along the 'line of flight', the direct

route which racers desired their birds to take on race-days, the final stretch being – in theory – the same for every race. In this way, racers structured their birds' movements through aerial space, their linear paths home becoming almost like circuits, loft to liberation to loft. Birds had regular and routine exercise and training, in order to mould, what 'Old Hand' (ND:60) referred to as, their "pattern of behaviour", likening this process to puppy training. Birds' bodily rhythms, therefore, were modified to a dictated routine, in order to create disciplined athletes.

In training a racing pigeon it was important that they were tame, and so birds' behaviours were modified in order to ease their interactions with racers in the loft. Whilst some early racers believed nervous birds were better at homing (Brent, 1859), by the twentieth century, most successful racers found it "more conducive to success to get their birds as tame as possible" (*RP*, 1904 (13(627):250)). One columnist advised that racers "accustom their birds to their voice and their presence amongst them", likening this to relationships with pets: "many...talk to their birds as affectionately as spinsters do to their tabbies, canaries and parrots (*RP*, 1904 (13(627):250)). Osman agreed that a racer should "teach his birds to know him and come to hand at once...by habit", some racers hand-feeding their birds as youngsters, or teaching them to feed from their mouth (fig. 7.18; also see fig. 6.14) (*RP*, 1918 (37(1872):257)). Thus, accounts in *The Racing Pigeon* suggest the development of close relationships between pigeon racers and their birds. The birds' natural timidity removed, trust was built up between a racer and his pigeons, which was integral to successful pigeon racing. However, racers claimed that some birds resisted such taming, demonstrating free-will or evading capture.



Figure 7.18: "Make them Tame", a racer feeding birds from his mouth, 1927 (left)

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1927 (77(1993):303)

Pigeons, then, were taught how to become athletes, although they were, racers admitted, “born with a capacity to learn easily” (*RP*, 1939 (69(2942):162)). In order to teach birds to fly directly home, racers used food as a tool for “getting birds under complete control”, hunger giving them an incentive to return quickly (*RP*, 1904 (13(627):251)). Racers also used various ‘tricks’ in order to exploit and amplify their birds’ innate love of home and desire to return – referred to as ‘driving to nest’ – trying to make their birds “excited naturally” (*RP*, 1933 (57(2626):193)). Some used artificial eggs to spur parental instinct; some paired two cocks to one female to foster jealousy; some kept male and female birds separate – referred to as ‘widowhood’ – to stimulate desire; and some replaced nest-box partitions with see-through materials to make birds protective over their nests. Whilst racers stimulated ‘natural’ reactions, the situations in which they put their birds were mediated and ‘unnatural’. Thus, the behaviour of pigeons kept in captivity was manipulated, their habits changed, and their ‘natural’ behaviours variously erased or exploited.

Some accounts from racers described the process of training as collaborative, pigeons and their racers working together. An article in *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1915:5) suggested that the sport was “the direct outcome of the combination and co-operation of human and avian effort...secured by a thorough understanding existing between the birds and their owners”. Thus, the practice of preparing birds for racing could be mutually transformative, racers and their birds becoming attuned to each other. A regular contributor to *The Racing Pigeon* argued that racers needed to *think like* pigeons in order to understand them, but also that racers should equally use “some method of thought transference...to imbue his birds with his own mentality” (*RP*, 1918 (37(1872):258)). For Osman, “reciprocity...[was] the keynote to success”, as well as “equality in relationships...fair dealing...mutual sympathy, mutual help, and mutual understanding” (*RP*, 1927 (46(2340):726)). The relationship involved in pigeon racing, therefore, was a partnership or a team, and the athlete produced was a combination of wild and domesticated Nature.

In captivity, then, racing pigeons were trained and moulded into athletes, racers “systematically forming” both individual birds and ‘the racing pigeon’ as a domesticated animal (*RP*, 1904 (13(618):494)). Racers believed that, through training, they were refining a ‘natural’ ability, but, as one racer pointed out, birds

were trained in “artificial conditions”, preventing them from having the “full scope and development of all its natural gifts” (*RP*, 1905 (14(653):222)). Nonetheless, many racers acknowledged that their birds still retained “many of their wild instincts”, to which racers tried to conform (*RP*, 1918 (37(1841):4)).

7.3 Understanding a Racing Pigeon

The homing ability, described by some racers as a “sixth sense”, challenged racers’ definitions of their birds, crafting a sense of wonder and awe (*RP*, 1939 (70(2980):313)). Pigeon racers were united in believing that a pigeon’s homing ability could be “perfected by training”, but the hypothesised mechanisms behind this ability divided them (*RP*, 1905 (14(642):9)). Indeed, scientists also struggled to come to a consensus, the racing pigeon framed as a mysterious enigma. In theorising pigeons’ abilities to orientate and navigate, racers attempted to comprehend the mental qualities that contributed to physical success, although, with no visible clues, racers had no way of truly exploiting and honing their birds’ abilities. As a result, racers never quite had full control over the outcome of races, admiring and respecting their birds.

Attempts to delineate homing ability variously redefined the racing pigeon as a ‘natural’ animal, an intelligent actor, a diligent student, and a powerful observer. They also, however, redefined the aerial lives of racing pigeons, theorising the ways in which pigeons used aerial spaces. The multiplicity of theories to explain the homing ability of racing pigeons suggests that the homing faculty was itself multifarious in nature. Indeed, the ability varied between individuals, implying that there were other unknown factors involved. Debates also had explicitly geographical dimensions, racers theorising the ways in which pigeons mapped out and navigated the landscape, attributing them a geographical consciousness. The degree of responsibility given to pigeons varied depending on the discourse used to explain their abilities, some theories acknowledging that racing pigeons could actively influence the outcome of races, diminishing, to some extent, the supremacy of racers.

7.3.1 Instinct vs. Intelligence

'Natural instinct', many racers believed, played a large part in the return of racing pigeons. Dr Tresidder, however, disparaged the overuse of the term 'instinct', "used...in order to avoid all explanation of this faculty" or to label the inexplicable (*RP*, 1905 (14(643):23)). Racers who criticised the 'instinct' theory turned to scientific definitions of the term to disprove its relevance. Quoting the 1882 paper 'Animal Intelligence' by evolutionary biologist – and friend of Darwin – George Romanes, a columnist in *The Racing Pigeon* explained that instinct had to be "similarly performed under the same appropriate circumstances by all individuals of the same species" (*RP*, 1904 (13(635):788)). Homing ability was, some racers argued, never 'similarly performed', neither by all pigeons nor by individuals. Most definitions of 'instinct' also referred to it as a "natural impulse...acting without reasoning", which, many argued, was the complete antithesis of the racing pigeon's homing faculty (*RP*, 1902 (8(342):258)). If this were true, birds' performances would have been consistent, and racers' devotion to careful breeding and training would have been futile.

An emphasis on instinct also disregarded the intelligence, learning capacity, and decision-making ability of pigeons, which many pigeon racers, it seems, admired and appreciated. In the early-twentieth century, one columnist explained, the idea of animal intelligence became important in philosophical and scientific discourse, a means of separating humans from animals. There was, he claimed, a general "aversion to the probability that animal intelligence is akin to human intelligence", animals believed to use instinct, whilst intelligence was a superior and distinctly human capacity (*RP*, 1905 (14(643):22)). Indeed, one racer referred to instinct as "one of the marvels of life...that controls the lower form of more or less sentient life", a contrast to "the intelligence that dominates...human choice" (*RP*, 1926 (45(2273):385)). Thus, racers in favour of 'natural instinct' reinforced, perhaps not deliberately, the idea that they were separate from, and superior to, their birds. Those who suggested, instead, that pigeons were rational and intelligent challenged this, proposing that pigeons had intentionality. This, therefore, speaks to wider philosophical questions about the relationship between humans and Nature, challenging Cartesian notions of a human-animal divide dictated by instinct and intent.

Nonetheless, the hypothesis that pigeons used intelligent reasoning seemed popular amongst racers. Tegetmeier (1871:98), for instance, had a “firm conviction that the homing faculty depends solely upon observation and intelligence”. Osman and Logan also both believed that pigeons could ‘think’ and ‘decide’, Logan (1924:18) ranking pigeons “very high in the scale of intellectual animals”. For some, then, pigeons had the ability to make decisions which could change the outcomes of races. One racer, for instance, believed that old birds could “become cunning...not exert[ing] themselves unduly in the long races, whilst younger birds, in their inexperience and anxiety, will fly themselves all out” (*RP*, 1933 (57(2638):276)). There were, nonetheless, regular incidents when pigeons appeared *unintelligent*, the most commonly mentioned being when birds flew past their lofts, what racers termed ‘over fly’. At times, Osman stated, it could seem like “the bird has not the sense to think whilst at others they proved their remarkable intelligence” (*RP*, 1916 (35(1750):204)).

In the second edition of Logan’s (1924:57) *Handbook*, one racer claimed that pigeons consciously chose certain routes when flying, being “just as likely as a human being to eliminate the impossible when faced with a difficult problem”. As racers hypothesised the flying routes of birds, interpreting their birds’ interactions with the environment, they framed the racing pigeon as logical and sensible, aware of meteorological and topographical challenges, and attributed them a geographical consciousness. Debates about pigeon intelligence, therefore, reveal a lot about racers’ geographical understanding and the ways in which this shaped their practices. The sport simultaneously used and produced certain types of geographical knowledge, creating an imagined geography of the ‘line of flight’. As already mentioned, pigeon racers debated whether the north or south road was best in terms of its balance between challenge and danger. Their arguments were, however, inherently geographical, racers identifying certain obstacles that, they felt, their birds would try to avoid. One racer suggested that birds learnt to “hug” the coast (*RP*, 1916 (35(1763):353)), another claiming that “they invariably funk the *direct* line”, avoiding hills, mountains, valleys, and water bodies (*RP*, 1935 (61(2726):73)).

In an example from the early-twentieth century, Yorkshire racers reportedly became divided by their decision to fly from the south-east or south-west. The south-west route was the most commonly used by Yorkshire clubs, but racers

appeared dissatisfied, since it forced birds to negotiate the Channel at its widest point. Advocates of the alternative south-east route, praised the shorter Channel-crossing, but also claimed that the relief of the land on this route benefited birds, the “entire absence of hills” less arduous than negotiating the Pennines in the west (*RP*, 1920 (39(1945):31)). Nonetheless, low velocities could occur on both routes into Yorkshire. Low velocities on the flat south-east route, one racer explained, were due to “the psychology of the pigeon...the long, dreary monotony of travelling over the veritable desert beneath them, produces an awfully depressing effect upon the brain of our birds” (*RP*, 1920 (39(1945):32)). Thus, again, the intelligence and jurisdiction of pigeons were brought to the fore. Pigeon racers, therefore, in constructing their own imaginative geographies of their birds’ routes, made explicit connections between aerial and terrestrial spaces, suggesting that their birds’ journeys through the skies were influenced as much by what was below them as by what was around them. This, therefore, added volume to pigeon racers’ practices and to their understanding of the aerial – and geographical – lives of racing pigeons.

Linked to, but not synonymous with, pigeon intelligence were memory and learning capacity. As one columnist explained: “our birds have to be taught the road home...its life and career is one of carefully graduated lessons” (*RP*, 1904 (13(637):820)). This further emphasised the importance of training and, by implication, the influence of racers. A lot of racers believed that pigeons used landmarks – such as mountains, hills, valleys, lakes, and the coastline – to navigate, remembering them from their training tosses along the ‘line of flight’, which aimed to familiarise birds with their geographical surroundings. Linked to this was the birds’ notable ability to see long-distance, racers generally agreeing that poor visibility in foggy weather caused losses and slow velocities. However, like other theories, there had been incidences which seemed to contradict it, birds homing in fog and mist. Indeed, an article in *The Homing Pigeon Annual* (1913:17) suggested that the racing pigeon’s sense of sight was not the only sensory faculty important to homing; they also used their ability to sense, read, and interpret aerial changes in air resistance, temperature, smells, and sounds.

Nonetheless, some of the most prominent figures in pigeon racing strongly supported the idea that racing pigeons used sight or observation, combined with memory, to find their way home, including Tegetmeier, Logan, Osman, and Dr

Tresidder. This, some suggested, could be ascertained from their behaviour immediately after liberation, birds circling around, appearing to gain their bearings from “familiar objects” (Tegetmeier, 1867:276). A letter – signed ‘H.O.D.’ – to *The Racing Pigeon* in 1939 suggested that birds used a “Trial and Error Theory” (RP, 1939 (69(2948):237)). According to the letter, pigeons could see for about 70 or 80 miles from the high altitudes at which they flew. A diagram (fig. 7.19) showed how birds ascertained the right direction to fly, mapping out the spatial behaviour of birds-in-the-air. When liberated for a race (point C), birds were too far away to see their loft (point A) or even the locations of previous training tosses (point B). The letter, therefore, proposed that birds flew in one direction (D) until they realised that their surroundings were unfamiliar, trying other directions (E and F) until they recognised their location. This, of course, assumed a reasonably high level of intelligence on the part of the pigeons, depicting them as capable of rational decision-making, and also giving them a great amount of responsibility. This, therefore, challenged definitions of the racing pigeon, showing their instrumental contribution to races.

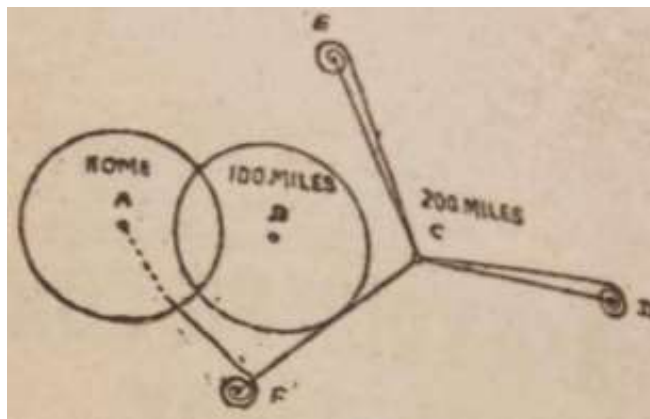


Figure 7.19: A trial and error theory for homing, 1939

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1939 (69(2948):237)

Homing theories, therefore, took into account geographical and environmental elements affecting racing pigeons. Racers’ discussions, in fact, frequently echoed Darwinian philosophies about environmental influences on animal evolution, such as the abovementioned debates about racing pigeon size. A further explicit example was their delineation of, what Osman termed, ‘locality’ – birds becoming habituated to their local environment. Racers regularly commented, for instance, that high-performing Belgian pigeons imported into Britain flew slower in their new lofts. Osman explained: “for generations the birds in each locality have been accustomed...habituated to the conditions”, such as temperature, weather, food,

and soil (*RP*, 1899 (3(105):516)). Thus, a successful racing pigeon was shaped by its surrounding geography, its homing ability – and success – potentially limited to those conditions. The sport of pigeon racing, then, became engaged in similar debates to those circulating amongst academic geographers at this time. Geographical thinking in the second half of the nineteenth century became imbued with Darwinian metaphors, geographers unearthing and disputing the environmental and social influences affecting evolution (Livingstone, 1992). Livingstone (1992:177) terms this “the geographical experiment – an experiment in keeping nature and culture under the one conceptual umbrella”. For pigeon racers, then, their birds’ athleticism was a product of natural, environmental, and cultural forces, a complex mixture of inherited, learnt, ‘natural’, humanly-shaped, and environmentally-influenced aerial abilities.

7.4 Racing Pigeons on Display

During the off-season (winter), pigeon racers also *exhibited* their birds, either in conjunction with fancy pigeon shows, at poultry and agricultural shows, or at specially-held shows for racing birds (fig. 7.20). This kept the interest in the sport alive at the end of the racing season, Osman remarking that, otherwise, birds could be “quite forgotten until the following spring” (*RP*, 1899 (3(91):320)). The first racing pigeon exhibitions were reportedly organised in the 1880s by the London Columbarian Society and the Manchester Flying Club – two of the largest racing clubs – the latter considering it “a very radical step” (*RP*, 1905 (15(740):931)).



Figure 7.20: “Peckham Show Exhibits”, 1916

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1916 (35(1741):92)

Classes for racing pigeons at fancy pigeon shows were variously titled 'racing pigeons', 'working homers', 'flying homers', or 'racing homers'. Birds were categorised into classes based on age, gender, and distances flown, although some shows also included colour-based classes. Ure (1886) stated that racing birds were very common at fancy shows, regularly making up half the entries in the late-nineteenth century. The data available from the sampled years, however, suggests that entries of racing pigeons at the Crystal Palace and Dairy Shows ranged from 1% to 10% of the total entries. Whilst this may seem small, these large shows provided classes for over thirty pigeon breeds and, thus, entries of racing pigeons were larger than some fancy varieties. By 1933, a letter to *The Feathered World* suggested that there were "increasing numbers" of racing pigeons at fancy shows (*FW*, 1933 (89(2308):376)).

Pigeon racers, it seems, preferred to enter local shows to avoid the stress and strain their birds might incur from travelling. Perhaps as a consequence, adverts and reports of racing pigeon shows were relatively scarce in *The Racing Pigeon*. Whilst the detail of reports in the paper – and, indeed, in *The Feathered World* – was inconsistent, the entry figures available suggest that shows specifically for racing pigeons ranged from around 30 to over 400 entries, the larger shows such as the Manchester F.C.'s annual show attracting over 1,000 entries. "One shilling and sixpence seems to be the popular entry fee", Osman wrote, "with prizes of 12s., 6s., and 3s., in each class...no more than a dozen classes...[and] A few special prizes", such as 'Racing Pigeon fivers' offered by his paper (Squills, 1912:24). Some of the most prominent men in pigeon racing acted as judges at shows, including Logan, Osman, and Dr Tresidder.

During World War One, when racing was restricted, local shows of racing pigeons were promoted as a means of keeping the pastime alive and to stop lofts becoming "museums of prisoners" (*RP*, 1914 (1662-63):290)). This link between war and shows continued as, in November 1928, Osman established the annual 'Old Comrades' Show' – continued by his son after his death – to celebrate the wartime work of the Carrier Pigeon Service (CPS), money raised from entry fees, auctions, and sales going to London Hospital. Entrants and attendees were comrades of the CPS, racers, soldiers, and officers. More than 1,000 birds were entered each year, the judging followed by a race and evening dinner. The Duke

of York (later King George VI) attended the first show (fig. 7.21), reportedly the first member of the Royal Family to attend a pigeon show.



Figure 7.21: "H.R.H. The Duke of York interested in a bird held by Lt.-Col. A.H. Osman. Sir Ed. Mountain (centre), H.R.H. The Duke's Private Secretary, and His Worship The Mayor of St. Pancras", 1928
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1928 (48(2404):434)

Racers praised shows for facilitating social interaction amongst racers, the 1899 Dairy Show report explaining that it "brought together fanciers from all parts who have exchanged opinions and made personal friendships that otherwise might never have taken place" (*RP*, 1899 (3(99):435)). It was, in fact, at a show in 1897 that racers first discussed the formation of the National Flying Club, one editorial in *The Racing Pigeon* stating that "many other good organisations for which the sport has greatly benefited, have been the outcome of meetings at shows" (*RP*, 1925 (44(2238):717)). Shows were also "an admirable and almost only opportunity of bringing the birds and the sport before the public" (Squills, 1912:23), although no visitor numbers were published by *The Racing Pigeon*.

In contrast, there were also some potentially damaging implications of these shows to the sport. The show pen was not a 'natural' space for these birds (Barker, 1913), racers expressing concern for the well-being and racing abilities of their birds. "The wear and tear of travelling coupled with confinement for a day or two in a heated and badly ventilated room", Osman warned, "must sooner or later tell on a bird's constitution" (*RP*, 1899 (3(91):320)). The conditions in the showroom were reputedly harmful to racing birds: "the heat, the [tobacco] smoke, the dust of a show room, the water in the small pannikins, the food on the pen floor, all go to mar the career of a pigeon of the future", one editorial wrote

(*RP*, 1925 (44(2251):935)). The practice of showing racing pigeons was, one racer claimed, “undoubtedly...a profitable business”, racers’ greed for money threatening the sport (*RP*, 1902 (9(432):844)). Over-showing birds, Osman explained, turned athletic racing pigeons into “simply puddings”, destroying their racing careers (*RP*, 1905 (14(654):233)). Furthermore, as will be explored, some racers, rather contentiously, bred racing pigeons specifically for the show pen. A regular columnist in *The Racing Pigeon*, therefore, stated: “no question in connection with our sport has given rise to such difference of opinion and aroused such bitter controversy from time to time as the showing of racing pigeons”(*RP*, 1911 (27(1346):439)). These exhibitions, then, raised debates about the ‘place’ of racing pigeons, their identities, once again, becoming contested.

7.4.1 Beautiful Athleticism

Due to different aesthetic tastes, the racing pigeon, like its fancy cousins, was mutable both in definition and physical form. Tegetmeier illustrated this with two sketches in Lyell’s (1887) *Fancy Pigeons* (fig. 7.22). The first showed “such a structure of head as indicates strength and endurance...without any tendency to the absurd exaggeration of any fancy points” (Lyell, 1887:367). This was the type, Tegetmeier believed, that *should* win in the show pen. His second sketch depicted one of his own exhibition winners, “certainly a handsome one, but not, in my opinion equal to the former”, he stated, the bird having a rounder head, bigger eye cere, and shorter ‘face’ (Lyell, 1887:369). By the twentieth century, the exhibition of racing pigeons was, one racer summarised, “probably the most complex question in connection with our great sport, for the simple reason that there are so many varied and quite opposite opinions as to their ideal racer” (fig. 7.23) (*RP*, 1904 (13(618):496)). Such diversity of opinion was mirrored by the birds’ conformational diversity, Logan asserting that there were “hardly two birds alike” (*RP*, 1902 (8(330):38)).

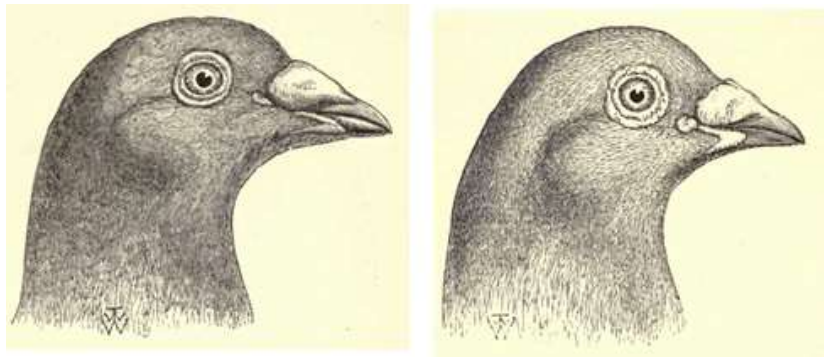


Figure 7.22: Tegetmeier's 'ideal' racing pigeon (left) and his 1875 winning show bird (right)

Source: Lyell (1887:367, 368)

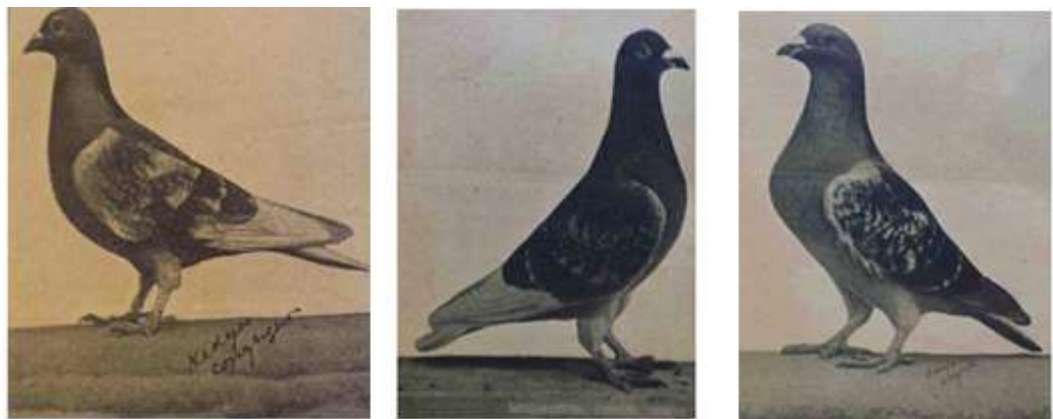


Figure 7.23: Photographs sent to 'The Racing Pigeon' of ideal racers for the show pen, 1904: "Mr Waddicor's Ideal", "Mr. Metcalfe's Ideal", "Mr. Hedges' Ideal, 'Goldfinder'"

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1904 (13(617):464, 465, 483

Whilst racers disagreed about "the importance which they attach[ed] to minor details" (Barker, 1913:157), most agreed that racing pigeons in the show pen should have physical characteristics associated with fitness and flying ability, such as symmetry, balance, condition, and strength. Show reports, then, briefly described the functional qualities of winning birds. Logan's report on racing pigeons at the 1899 Dairy Show, for instance, used phrases such as "intelligent-looking", "nicely put together", "looking very fit", "good wing flights", "all over a worker", "in splendid condition", "good shoulders", "good feather", "symmetrically built throughout", "good racy stamp", "nice eye", "powerfully built", "well-proportioned", and "evenly balanced" (*RP*, 1899 (3(99):435)). A 'show bird', one columnist explained, was – or should be – "merely a handsome, well-proportioned, and well-conditioned racing pigeon" (*RP*, 1911 (27(1364):716)). However, some of the most essential qualities of a racing

pigeon – speed, endurance, and intelligence – were, racers worried, impossible to judge from looks alone. Osman lamented that racers could not “penetrate beneath the surface and estimate the exact nature of the ‘unknown’ factor”, struggling to equate ability with appearance (*RP*, 1905 (14(648):117)). The decidedly visual nature of shows, then, challenged racers’ definitions of athleticism and fitness, framing it as an externally visible quality, almost contradicting their attention to pedigree breeding. Understandably, then, for some racers shows were an inaccurate assessment of pigeon athleticism.

Racing pigeons had to be ‘prepared’ for the show pen. Osman explained:

“the preparation of pigeons for the pen is an art...similar to the shopkeeper’s art of laying out his window to attract customers...He feeds his birds, and treats them to get their coats to fit well and look well...these specially prepared and nicely conditioned birds are the attractions in the shop window to take his [the judge’s] eye” (*RP*, 1925 (44(2238):717)).

Birds’ wattles, feet, and feathers were cleaned, food monitored, and bent feathers straightened (Baker, 1913), racers paying attention to those aesthetic features they believed denoted “true signs of vigour” (*FW*, 1907 (36(930):739)). Such aesthetic ‘finishing touches’, scorned by fancy pigeon exhibitors, were, it seems, embraced by pigeon racers, although some acknowledged that this was ‘unnatural’ treatment for racing pigeons. The racing pigeon, tamed and taught, became a performer, its aesthetics choreographed for the show pen. *The Feathered World’s* racing correspondent explained that birds should be “upstanding...every line about it clearly saying ‘Look me over; I’m ready’, it will almost demand attention” (*FW*, 1907 (36(933):859)). As a result, Osman wrote, “the expert exhibitor spends much time and thought getting his birds to pose in the pen” (*RP*, 1925 (44(2238):717)). Preparation also took on more unlawful forms, some racers ‘faking’ their birds in similar, but less extreme, ways to fancy pigeon exhibitors. At one London Columbarian Society show, for instance, Osman remarked:

“on using a white handkerchief...I was able to wipe off a good deal of artificial colour...carefully painted round the [eye] ceres to give them a

deep colour and add to the beauty of the pigeon" (*RP*, 1916 (35(1738):40)).

In other cases, like make-up artists, racers "powder[ed] the wattles with prepared chalk to make them look immaculately white", a letter wrote (*RP*, 1930 (52(2507):377)). These 'backstage' practices were, therefore, superficial, adjusting a bird's aesthetics – and perceived 'beauty' – but, Osman stressed, they were nowhere near as common or as cruel as alterations made by fancy pigeon exhibitors.

Exhibitions of racing pigeons, then, entered racers not only into debates about 'athleticism', but also about 'beauty'. A relatively common saying amongst pigeon racers was "handsome is as handsome does" (*RP*, 1899 (3(100):445)), believing that, according to one columnist, there was nothing more beautiful than:

"the pigeon...best built for racing purposes...the beautiful simplicity of its form, devoid of all superabundance of unnecessary parts, its graceful carriage, its keen, intelligent head and eyes, its beautiful feathering" (*RP*, 1904 (13(611):378)).

This, therefore, echoes Parson's (2007) notion of 'functional beauty', birds' aesthetic features linked to their function. Shows, however, simultaneously mobilised a conflicting definition of 'beauty' that *rejected* function. Some racers bred birds purposely for the show pen, their 'beauty' dictated by ornamental – i.e. non-functional – aesthetic features, such as eyes, feathers, wattle, eye cere, head shape, and colour. As mentioned, some racers had fancies for such aesthetic features, supposedly indicating athleticism, but in the setting of the show pen these aesthetic tastes obscured practical judgements.

Advocates of a more functional approach to beauty used the term 'pretty' to disparage and separate this superficial approach from their own, Osman stating that "all the prettiness in the world will not get a bird home in a trying race" (*RP*, 1905 (15(739):896)). One racer explained that there was a big difference between "physical perfectness" and "*apparent* beauty" (*RP*, 1904 (13(614):430)), whilst another argued that "beauty is only skin deep" (*RP*, 1904 (13(616):465)). Due to these two competing definitions of 'beauty', one regular contributor to *The*

Racing Pigeon wrote, there was a “tendency to imagine that a so-called ‘show bird’ is something entirely separate and apart from the ordinary racing pigeon” (*RP*, 1911 (27(1364):716)). *The Feathered World’s* racing correspondent explained that there were “two distinct and well-defined forms”: “sleekness and plumpness” for the show pen and “balance and muscularity” for racing (*FW*, 1907 (36(930):739)).

7.4.2 ‘Likeliest Flier’

Classes for racing pigeons at shows often included ‘likeliest flier’ classes, also referred to as ‘flown or not’ or ‘trained or not’. These were contentious, some racers entering specially-bred show birds. Letters to *The Racing Pigeon* referred to such birds as ‘frauds’, one racer calling them “manufactured mongrel[s]” (*RP*, 1911 (27(1364):716)). Although most prominent racers, including Osman and Logan, actively discouraged this practice, it was, nonetheless, relatively common, one racer in 1908 claiming: “the majority of the birds that are winning in the show pen are bred for the purpose” (*RP*, 1908 (21(1046):682)). Racing pigeons had little chance against these pampered show specimens, which were ‘neater’ in appearance because, not having raced, they had completed their moult. It was, however, “obvious”, *The Racing Pigeon* wrote, that “if the pigeon has flown the distance during the current year it cannot be completely moulted out” during the winter (*RP*, 1935 (62(2769):333)). Racers appealed, unsuccessfully, to the NHU to extend their prioritisation of fair-play to shows, but, at the 1932 Crystal Palace Show, Dr Tresidder estimated that only about 10% of the birds shown in ‘flown’ classes were genuine racing birds.

Perhaps the only way to eliminate such inconsistencies at racing pigeon shows would have been to race the exhibits. At early shows of racing pigeons, Tegetmeier reportedly promoted this, liberating exhibits after judging (Lyll, 1887). This, however, restricted entries to a limited radius, racers not wanting to fly their birds long distances during winter. What racers desired was for prizes to “go to bona-fide racing pigeons, the property of bona-fide racing men”, *The Racing Pigeon* wrote (*RP*, 1910 (25(1250):586)). Their concern, then, was that only racers who had earned their reputations by winning races should be honoured in the show pen, their reputations built on the athletic *aerial* achievements of their birds.

It was the breeding of racing pigeons specifically for the show pen – and cross-breeding with *fancy* breeds – which, as mentioned in Chapter 5, had led to the formation of new fancy varieties of Homer, criticised by both fancy and racing pigeon fanciers as “craze[s] for type and fashion” (*RP*, 1905 (14(668):507). Racers were aware, one editorial wrote, that breeding for fancy points had also caused Carriers, Antwerps, and Dragoons – previously “genuine workers, pure and unsullied” – to lose their athletic abilities, becoming “absolutely worthless” for long-distance racing (*RP*, 1899 (3(98):419)). The Show Homer, racers concurred, had been “produced by sacrificing all that is best in the real article” (*RP*, 1899 (3(98):419)), one racer calling them a “modern monstrosity” or “*sham* homers” (*RP*, 1899 (3(101):467)). Fancy pigeon exhibitors also expressed concern (see Chapter 5), Reverend Lumley explaining: “immediately the fancier has attempted to take liberties with the natural structure for flying power...and to add and require certain symmetrical proportions of skull and body formation, *art has supplanted Nature*”, arguing that there was an “already long list of fancy pigeons, under the misnomer of the Homer” (*FW*, 1891 (5(126):406)). Pigeon racers argued that birds bred solely for exhibition needed to be “in their proper place”, rather than shown against proven racers (*RP*, 1905 (15(736):825)), whilst fancy pigeon men, Ure (1886:70) claimed, believed that racing pigeons were “out of place on the show bench”. Such debates suggest, therefore, that shows created a frontier, the space of the show pen defining breeds as either ‘in’ or ‘out of place’.

At the heart of racers’ concerns about breeding racing pigeons specifically for the show pen was the potential for history to repeat itself, the resultant birds losing their flying ability. One editorial cautioned:

“there ever must be great danger of impairing their utility in the practice of showing any animals kept mainly for work...shows have produced hens that won’t lay, terriers that won’t go to ground, hackneys that can’t travel...hunters that can’t jump...homers that would not home” (*RP*, 1899 (3(100):445)).

It was important, one racer explained, to try to “uphold the integrity of the true working homer” as a working breed (*RP*, 1905 (15(736):825)), one regular columnist stating that “under no circumstances whatever must utility be

sacrificed for ornament" (*RP*, 1911 (27(1364):715)). With this in mind, then, some shows also held 'distance' classes, which stipulated the distances – 75 miles, 100 miles, 200 miles, 300+ miles – that entrants had to have raced during the preceding season. However, in 1902, *The Racing Pigeon* reported that it was "surprising how poorly the classes for proved workers fill as compared with those for 'likeliest fliers' (*RP*, 1902 (9(402):366)). Indeed, from the figures available, the 'likeliest fliers' classes at the Crystal Palace and Dairy Shows had either the largest or second largest entries, making up between a third and half of racing pigeon entries. A further concern was, Osman bemoaned, that "far too little care is taken as to the confirmation of the distances flown by organisers of shows", making it easy for racers to cheat by forging race certificates, wing stamps, race marks, and even race reports (*RP*, 1905 (14(652):186)). By 1923, it was reportedly compulsory for racing pigeons exhibited at the Dairy Show to be wearing a recognised race ring, although racers still complained that most shows did little to discourage show birds. Shows of racing pigeons then, designed as displays of athletic 'working' birds, concealed rather than revealed athleticism.

7.4.3 Standardising Racing Pigeon Aesthetics

With only sight and feel to go by, there was, Osman stated, a "certain intuition" in judging racing pigeons at shows (*RP*, 1905 (14(648):117)). The duties of a judge were, then, "at best onerous and thankless", one columnist wrote (*RP*, 1911 (27(1346):439)). Judges were expected "to award the prizes to those birds which, in his opinion, besides being so far as he can judge, probably good racers, are in the best condition of body and feather when he holds them in his hand" (*RP*, 1910 (25(1234):363)). Like the exhibitors, however, judges had their own types or preferences, which racers scorned as "pet fads" (*RP*, 1902 (9(432):844)) or "droll and unaccountable preferences" (*RP*, 1908 (21(1029):422)). This unpredictable element to racing pigeon exhibitions proved unsettling to pigeon racers, who, throughout the conduct of their sport, strove for control, standardisation, and precision. One racer explained:

"in the case of flying...there can be no doubt as to which is the fastest or gamest bird, but a win in the show pen is...but an expression of opinion...not a matter of indisputable fact" (*RP*, 1899 (2(52):227)).

Whether there should be a fixed standard for judging racing pigeons at shows was a topic which “provided matter for endless controversy”, one columnist wrote (*RP*, 1911 (27(1346):440)). A standard, if produced, racers argued, should award points for features “best adapted for flying purposes”, such as feather, size, head, wings, tail, keel, and condition (*FW*, 1903 (28(710):235)). Whilst an official standard does not appear to have been drawn up, in 1888, Manchester Columbarian Society – a *fancy* pigeon society – produced the only example of a standard mentioned by racers. The Society vowed to “keep in sight the qualities of the working bird”, rating very highly the properties associated with flight:

“the head...from tip to back of head, horizontally, is 2 ½ inches, tip of beak to centre of eye 1 ½ inches, and the other properties in proportion... compactly built...smart and characteristic appearance” (*RP*, 1908 (21(1045):662)).

The standard also, however, still had an aesthetic dimension, specifying “a pearl or a very bright red eye”, the surrounding cere “the same shade as the feathers around the eye” (*RP*, 1908 (21(1045):662)). The illustration produced by the Society (fig. 7.24) was criticised by *The Racing Pigeon*’s readers, its body “too deep and short”, its head too small, its keel too broad, and its wings too short (*RP*, 1908 (21(1045):662)).



Figure 7.24: “Type of Homer adopted by the Manchester Columbarian Society, 1888”

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1908 (21(1045):661)

Some racers argued that standards were the only way to regulate the outcome of shows and to ensure that the birds being shown resembled the racing breed. Others stressed the futility of a fixed standard due to the variability in appearances of successful racing pigeons. Standards were, one columnist warned, “artificial” and “extremely harmful”, constructing a certain way of seeing birds and redefining them based on appearance (*RP*, 1905 (14(644):41)). Osman had, in fact, been “repeatedly invited to take part in the drawing up of standards for judging flying homers, but...invariably refused” (*RP*, 1905 (14(668):507)). He wanted “to see judges...award prizes, not to imaginary, impossible ideals, but to birds built for racing and judged as athletes” (*RP*, 1905 (14(652):186)). Another racer added that they should breed “the useful Real” rather than “the Ideal” defined by a standard (*RP*, 1908 (21(1051):766)). Dr Tresidder warned that, from a Darwinian perspective, standards could lead to the “degeneration” and loss of flying abilities that racers feared (*RP*, 1939 (70(2963):133)). The racing pigeon in the show pen, then, had a very uncertain identity, becoming a battleground for athletic and aesthetic debate.

7.5 Picturing Athleticism

Pigeon racers also engaged with aesthetic questions through the depiction of their prized birds in paintings and photographs. These pigeon portraits were used in *The Racing Pigeon* and books as instructional or illustrative aids accompanying articles and adverts. They acted as ‘texts’ framing fitness and athleticism, the birds depicted boasting racing success and illustrious pedigrees. Thus, like fancy pigeons – and, indeed, prize-winning livestock or racehorses at the time – successful racing pigeons became works of art both physically and figuratively, displayed as admired athletes and proud human achievements. Their depiction in various media further illustrated the close links between seeing and knowing, making absent birds appear present and invisible signs of ability seem visible. Thus, again, racers made complex associations between visual appearance and physical ability. Pigeon racers’ definitions and understandings of athleticism were, therefore, simultaneously displayed and (re)produced by the artistic representation of their birds.

7.5.1 Painting Athleticism

Reproductions of paintings in *The Racing Pigeon* were not very common, although painted portraits of successful racing pigeons appear to have been highly-valued as celebrations of pigeons' successes, some racers having their winning birds painted in oils by specialist artists. Such birds, one racer wrote, had "more than gained and deserved that honour" (*RP*, 1910 (25(1260):735)). Indeed, some racers reportedly had collections of oil paintings hung in their homes and lofts, portraying their favourites as celebrations of both avian athleticism and human mastery.

To accompany a series of articles in 1902 entitled 'Famous Pigeons I Have Known', for instance, *The Racing Pigeon* reproduced a commissioned portrait of Monsieur Gits' "celebrated pigeon" Donkeren (fig. 7.25) (*RP*, 1902 (8(366):655)). Mons. Gits kept the original portrait, the article reported, "in his sanctum", in memory of the late Donkeren (*RP*, 1902 (8(366):655)). The portrait showed the bird away from the confinement of his loft, and included a stone headed in French and Dutch: "*Male noir écaillé, dit den Donkeren 1875-1885*" ('tortoiseshell black male, this is Donkeren 1875-1885'). The stone was inscribed with some of Donkeren's best achievements and '*prix*' (prizes) over a career spanning 10 years, further illustrating how racing pigeons could become defined by their racing careers.



Figure 7.25: "M. G. Gits' famous Donkeren", 1902

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1902 (8(366):655)

Colour images in *The Racing Pigeon* were rare, reserved for supplements and special issues. That Mr Hoyle's painting of 'Royal Messenger' was chosen for one such supplement in 1935, then, suggests the importance of both the bird and its portrait (fig. 7.26). The subject of Hoyle's painting was the first bird home in a race to celebrate King George V's Jubilee, the bird's owner having the painting

made to celebrate “this unique achievement” (*RP*, 1935 (62(2749):19)). Hoyle had chosen to portray the bird in the loft, stood upright and alert, in a similar style to livestock – and, indeed, fancy pigeon – portraiture. The paper called it “certainly the best colour picture of a racing pigeon we have ever seen” (*RP*, 1935 (62(2749):19)), crediting Hoyle “for his excellent work” (*RP*, 1935 (62(2750):35)).



Figure 7.26: Colour painting of *Royal Messenger*, 1935
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1935 (62(2750):supplement)

However, for some racers, paintings were not lifelike enough. One letter to *The Racing Pigeon* stated that paintings did not “represent the true outline of a bird, being too stiff” (*RP*, 1898 (1(33):533)). Another racer sent the paper a copy of an oil painting of a bird named ‘Favourite’ (fig. 7.27) which he criticised as “very misleading”, giving “the impression of being made to order” (*RP*, 1904 (13(620):532)). Thus, paintings created an illusion of a fixed, stable, and somewhat formulaic athleticism, similar, in a way, to racers’ preoccupations with pedigree breeding. The static display of pigeon athleticism in paintings, however,

seemed contradictory, unable to capture the movement of these athletes and their ability to conquer the skies. Paintings, then, were too aestheticized and inaccurate for some pigeon racers, although they were not discussed very often in *The Racing Pigeon*, suggesting that their birds' performances were, perhaps, more important to racers.



Figure 7.27: A 'misleading' oil painting, 1904

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1904 (13(618):495)

7.5.2 Photographing Athleticism

Whilst the use of photography in papers during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was quite rare, reproductions of photographs in *The Racing Pigeon* were more common than paintings, and, indeed, more common than they were in *The Feathered World*. The low-quality paper used to keep the cost of *The Racing Pigeon* affordable, however, meant that reproductions of photographs could be grainy, colour photographs reserved for glossy supplements and special editions (fig. 7.28). The paper prized itself in reproducing photographs of "only birds of merit", thus telling a one-sided, imaginatively-constructed story (*RP*, 1904 (13(614):429)). Every photograph included, then, was a model bird, used to frame athleticism and contribute to the imaginative construction of the athletic racing pigeon. These photographs were sometimes exhibited at shows, medals

awarded “for excellency of work as well as arrangement of exhibits from an attractive point of view”, one racer explained (*RP*, 1905 (15(729):674)).

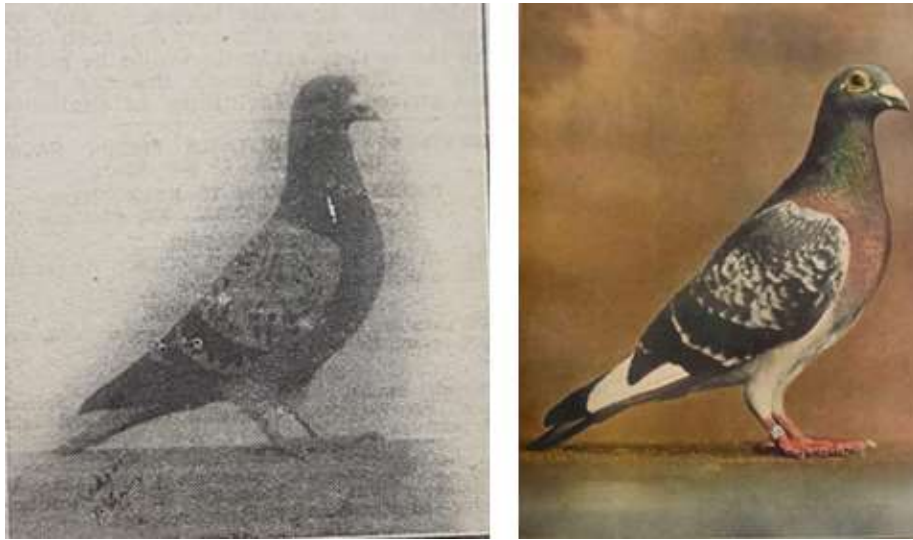


Figure 7.28: Photograph printed on low-quality paper, 1929 (left); Colour photograph printed on glossy paper, 1908 (right)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1929 (49(2412):59); 1908 (21(1012):supplement)

The majority of photographs in *The Racing Pigeon* were professionally-taken close-ups, published alongside birds' pedigrees and performances in race reports, articles, and adverts. These portraits were commissioned, taken by independent pigeon photographers, and used by racers as either mementos or publicity. The winning birds of some major races, for instance, were sent to London “on the invitation of THE RACING PIGEON, photographed, and appeared in the paper” (*RP*, 1930 (52(2512):416)). Like paintings, photographic portraits always depicted racing pigeons standing upright and facing to one side. One letter explained that birds were portrayed “all on the alert, ready to be ‘off’” to infer their desire and ability to fly, the letter affirming: “this shows instinct” (*RP*, 1904 (13(620):513)). Racers, however, did not reveal how they got their birds to pose, nor whether they ‘prepared’ their appearances for the photoshoot. Like photographs of fancy pigeons, the background to professional photographs of racing pigeons was always plain, so as not to detract from the bird.

There were two professional pigeon photographers who featured very prominently in the pages of *The Racing Pigeon*: ‘Hedges’ and ‘Musto’. Mr Hedges of Lytham supplied photographs for adverts and articles used in the paper since its inception (fig. 7.29), and also for Barker’s (1913) *Practical Guide* (fig. 7.30).

'Messrs. D. Hedges & Sons' – his family-run company – were themselves experienced pigeon racers, four of their birds being included in Osman's first national stud register in 1906. Establishing their trade in 1870 as photographers of birds and dogs, by 1933, they were "by appointment photographers to H.M. the King" (*RP*, 1933 (57(2629):159)).

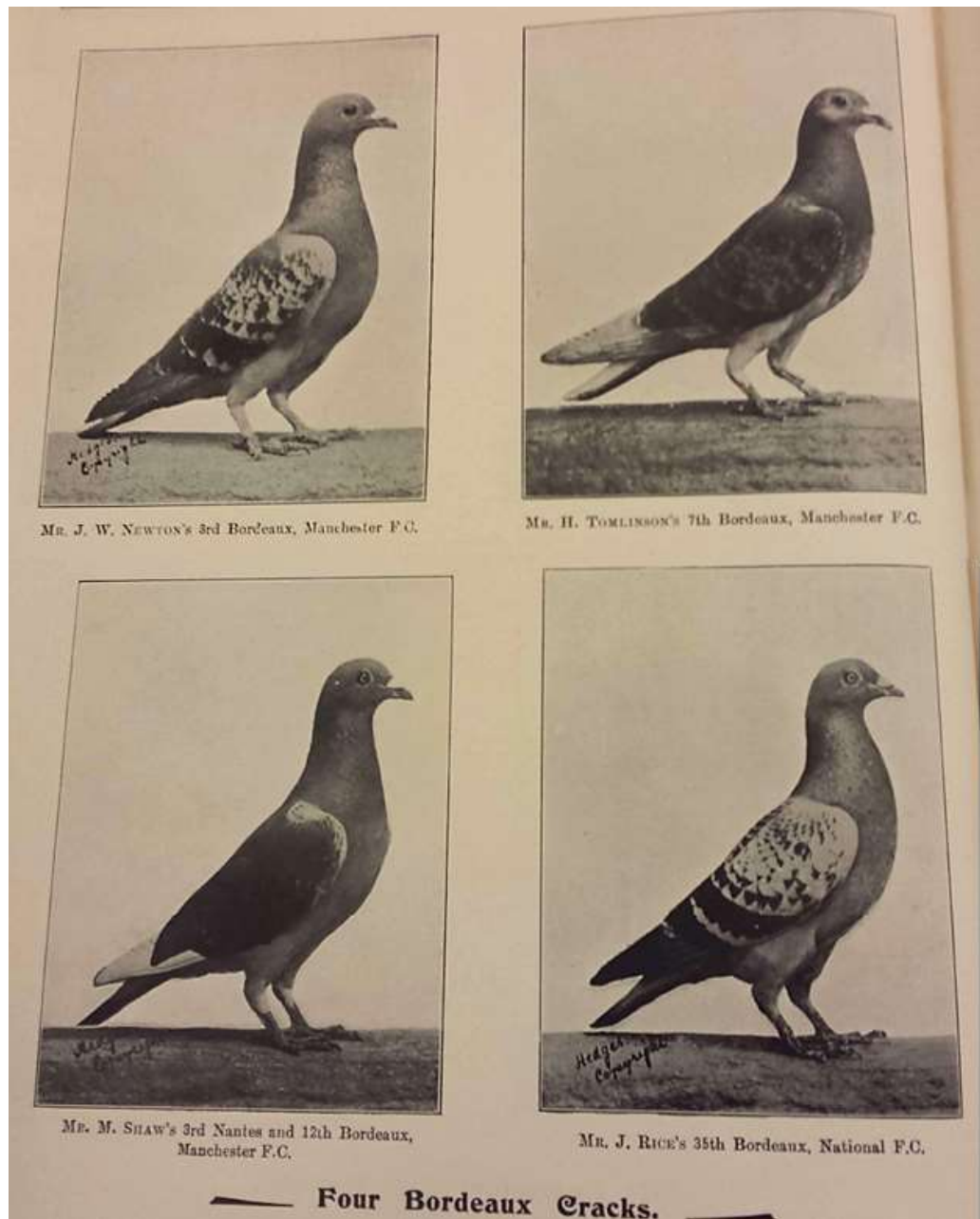


Figure 7.29: Hedges' photographs in *The Racing Pigeon*, 1914

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1902 (8(328):14)

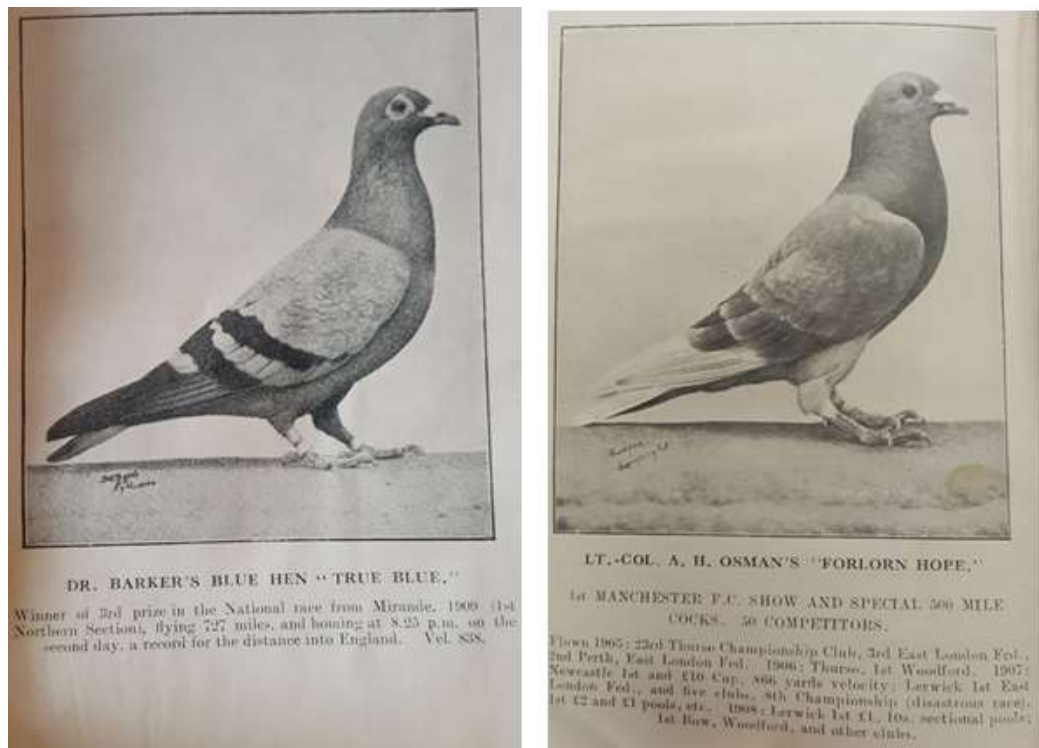


Figure 7.30: Hedges' photographs in Barker (1913)


Source: Barker (1913:inserts)

Mr Hedges owned and managed a studio for animal photography in Birmingham, at the offices of Mr W. Crow's paper, *The Homing Pigeon* (fig. 7.31). Hedges' advert claimed that he had "capital accommodation" for animals staying overnight, implying that the process of capturing the perfect photograph could be time-consuming (*The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1915:32). The advert stated that Hedges was highly recommended for both the quality of his photographs and the care with which he looked after his subjects, although this came at a relatively high price, the advert quoting 21 shillings for 12 photographs.

The Crescent Studio for Animal and Bird Photography.

Under the Management of Mr. DAVID M. HEDGES, late of the Firm of Messrs. David Hedges & Sons, Lytham, the World-famed Animal and Bird Photographers.

Canine, Feline, and Pigeon Photography a Speciality.



HEAD STUDY.

The Studio is ten minutes' walk from L. & N.W., Mid. and G.W. Railway Stations; 2 minutes' walk from Bingley Hall.

With few exceptions the whole of the illustrations embellishing the "H.P. Annual" are from Photographs taken at the Crescent Studio.

THE CRESCENT STUDIO has been fitted with most modern appliances and the best possible results will always be obtained. Capital accommodation has been provided for the comfort and safety of all animals and birds which may have to remain overnight.

The wide experience of Mr. DAVID M. HEDGES, covers a period of nearly 20 years, which is a recommendation to dog owners and pigeon fanciers, that dogs and birds, during their absence from home, will be under the care of an experienced fancier.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO—

Manager, "Crescent Studio," 7, Crescent, Birmingham.

Tel: "Flyers, B'ham." Phone 6431 Central.

TERMS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING ANIMALS.

21/- each subject, which will entitle you to one dozen Cabinet Photos or one Enlargement, 12 by 10 mounted on plate-sunk mount, 20 by 16, and one Cabinet. These terms are conditional that the Proprietors of the Crescent Studio retain the right to sell copies of any photographs taken by them.

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Figure 7.31: Advert for Hedges' studio, 1915

Source: *The Homing Pigeon Annual*, 1915:32

From the 1930s, photographs by 'Musto' also regularly appeared in articles and adverts in *The Racing Pigeon* (fig. 7.32), as well as in the *Squills Diaries* (fig. 7.33). Throughout the 1930s, Mr Musto was employed by the paper to photograph winning birds in certain races, his photographs printed in the paper, mounted as 'presentation photos', and sold to the birds' owners for the relatively expensive fee of £1 15s. each.



Figure 7.32: Musto's photography accompanying race results, 1935

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1935 (62(2750):45)



Red Chequer Cock
NURP.28.MM.551
Son of "Olympic"

Blue Chequer Hen
NURP.29.HE.3115
Daughter of "Olympic"
and Dam of 1st Newark, King's
Cross H.S., 1933, Thurso, 1934,
and the 1935 Lerwick Prize
winner. Has bred other winners
for me and other fanciers.

MAJOR W. H. OSMAN
19, Doughty Street, LONDON, W.C.1

Figure 7.33: Musto's photographs used in an advert in the 1938 'Squills Diary'

Source: *Squills Diary*, 1938:52

Letters and articles in *The Racing Pigeon* generally praised professional photographs as realistic enough for racers to both recognise the bird and learn from its example. "Life-like photos of winning pigeons have always been a prominent feature of THE RACING PIGEON", a regular columnist wrote, having "an excellent educatory effect upon hundreds of fanciers who would otherwise be out of touch with the *élite* of the racing Fancy" (*RP*, 1905 (15(713):956)). This implied that, for some racers – perhaps the poorest or most geographically remote – the press guided their knowledge and recognition of successful racing birds, *The Racing Pigeon* thus constructing definitions of – and a 'way of seeing' – racing pigeon athleticism through its illustrative material. These photographs, however, also (re)expose the inherent conflict between visible and invisible signs of athleticism, tempting racers to interpret them as visual guides for breeding

and, thus, making judgements about the birds' proven racing abilities based on their visual aesthetics.

Some racers, nonetheless, were cautious to assume the accuracy of photographs. Osman, for instance, stated that, a photograph of Mr Thoroughgood's 26A (fig. 7.34) had "caught this famous hen at the right moment", making her instantly recognisable, whereas a photograph of Thoroughgood's 'No.896' (fig. 7.34), did "not do him justice...he is hardly so narrow-chested as he appears" (*RP*, 1899 (2(52):228)). Due to the strong links identified between racers' reputations and their athletic birds, it was, therefore, important that photographs were lifelike. One racer, in 1908, stated that racers were wrong to believe "that the camera does not lie", warning that it was possible to "photograph from different angles and give one quite a different idea...of the same object" (*RP*, 1908 (21(1043):632)). The accuracy and reliability of photographs were, however, seldom scrutinised in this way by *The Racing Pigeon's* readers. This suggests that, despite the sometimes strong aesthetic arguments in debates about pigeon athleticism, racers did not prioritise appearances. Vision could be mediated, culturally constructed, and misleading, and, as a result, practical pigeon racers defined the racing pigeon by performances and pedigree. This was illustrated, for instance, in racers' personal stud books, the pages of which provided no space for racers to insert photographs of their birds.

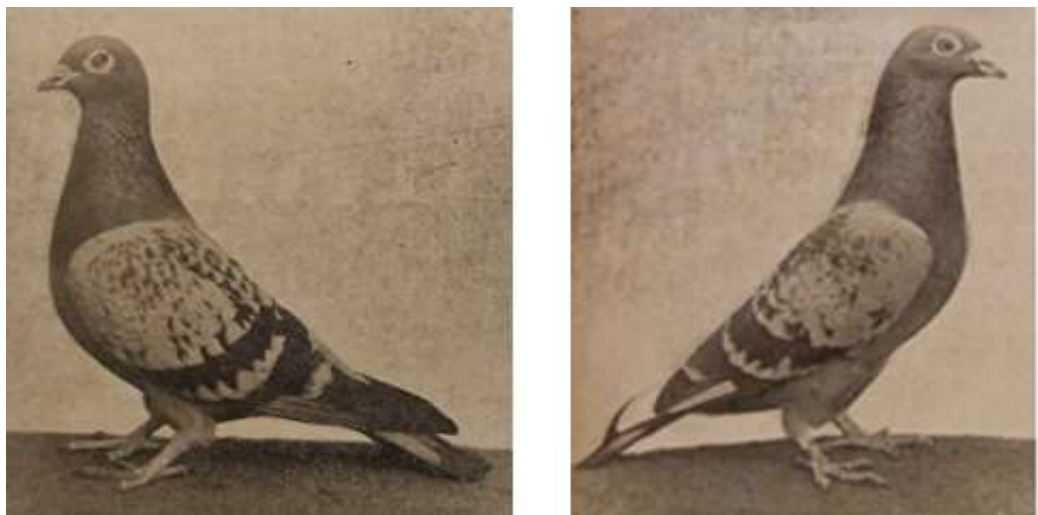


Figure 7.34: "26A" (left) and "No.896" (right), 1899
Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899 (2(52):228, 229)

In contrast to the very formal style of professional pigeon portraits, *The Racing Pigeon* also contained photographs – accompanying letters or articles – which showed birds in more familiar situations, distinctively in domestic everyday spaces such as the loft or garden (fig. 7.35). Whilst these photographs may have been taken at opportune moments to depict very specific encounters, they, nonetheless, seem less ‘manufactured’. They could, in fact, be interpreted as reflections of the pride which racers had for their birds, racers keen to capture images of their sport. Indeed, the paper encouraged photography amongst racers, making arrangements in 1899 with a camera manufacturer to sell pigeon racers cut-price cameras (fig. 7.36), reportedly “what no other paper has ever dreamt of” (*RP*, 1899 (2(54):268)).



Figure 7.35: “The loft at the Warren” accompanying an article on Mr Taft, 1898 (left); “Mr H. Jarvis with Caen Winner on right hand” accompanying his advert, 1939 (right)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1898 (1(28):453); 1939 (69(2938):v)

RACING PIGEON

10,000 SPLENDID HAND CAMERAS.



4/6 EACH

4/6 EACH

NOTICE.—"RACING PIGEON" is going to do for its readers what no other paper has ever dreamt of doing. We have made arrangements with one of the largest Camera Manufacturers in Great Britain to supply 10,000 Hand Cameras, complete with Double Dark Slide, Focusing Screen, and Shutter for time and instantaneous exposures. With each Camera will be given a supply of Photographic Materials, Dry Plates, Developing Solutions, Fixing Salts, and a set of Instructions, enabling anyone, without previous knowledge, to take a Photograph with the greatest of ease. This Camera takes a Photo equal to any Camera costing £5.

Price 4/6, 6d. extra for postage.

NOTICE.—With this Camera objects have been taken on Land from H.M.S. "Monarch," when three miles from the Shore, and the Vessel steaming ten knots per hour.

The "Racing Pigeon" Tourist's Camera.

We have made arrangements for 2,500 "Racing Pigeon" Tourist's Hand Cameras, with three Double Dark Slides, View Finder, Time and Instantaneous Shutter, Powerful Lens, and a full supply of Materials, and Book of Instructions. This is a splendid instrument, valued by the Manufacturers at 21/- each. We are going to let our readers have them at 7/6 each, and 6d. extra Parcel Postage—8/- in all.

"Racing Pigeon" No. 3 Hand Camera

Carries eight Quarter-plates in sheath. This is a first-class Hand Camera, fitted with first-class Rapid Achromatic Lens, View Finder, Time and Instantaneous Shutter (estimated speed) 1-500 second. Automatic Plate changes, certain in action. A splendid Camera, Lens working at aperture F. 11. A perfect Hand Camera, complete with Dry Plates, Developer, Fixing Solutions, and Instructions. 10/6; 6d. extra for carriage, 11/- in all.

RULES.—All persons sending must cut out Coupon and state in it which Camera they require. 6d. extra must be sent on each Camera for Parcel Postage. That is 5/- in all for the 4/6 Camera, 8/- for the 7/6 Camera, and 11/- for the 10/6 Camera. Foreign readers must send 2/6 extra for Postage in each case. All orders to be sent to

THE "RACING PIGEON" OFFICE,
8, Temple Chambers, London, E.C.

"RACING PIGEON" CAMERA COUPON
Please send me Camera named above.

Name.....

Address.....

For which enclose Postal Order for.....

Figure 7.36: Advert for cameras sold by 'The Racing Pigeon', 1899

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899 (2(54):268)

Drawing on pigeon racers' pride and passion, in May 1930, *The Racing Pigeon* launched a 'Snapshot Competition' (fig. 7.37), which ran for the rest of the year, racers invited to send in personal (amateur) photographs, a prize of half a guinea (10s. 6d.) awarded each week. The editorial launching the competition stated that "nowadays...nearly everyone owns a camera", appealing to racers to send in photographs "not only...of pigeons, but...also...of any amusing or interesting incident connected with the sport, with local fanciers or their lofts" (RP, 1930 (51(2482):339)).

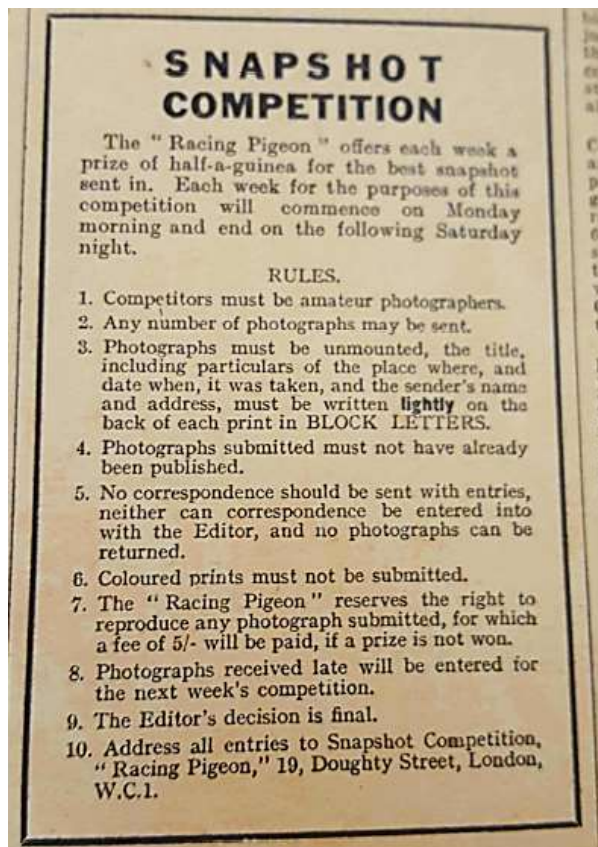


Figure 7.37: Advert for the 'Snapshot Competition' in 'The Racing Pigeon', 1930

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1930 (51(2461):28)

The amateur photographs sent in portrayed birds in the loft or outside, undertaking part of their daily routines. None of the photographs published featured just one pigeon, or even a group of pigeons in close-up, and none were without human presence, emphasising the human-pigeon encounters involved in the sport. The majority of winning photographs, in fact, showed children with their fathers' birds, suggesting that, whilst not quite pets, these birds were, to some extent, part of the family (fig. 7.38). Photographs portraying the racer with his birds usually depicted daily tasks, thus reiterating the important role that

pigeon racers played in caring for birds (fig. 7.39). These photographs of day-to-day life, it can be argued, captured the physical and metaphorical mobility of the racing pigeon that was lost in professional portraits, displaying the collaborative relationship between racers and their birds. In this way, they framed athleticism as a state achieved through human control over their birds, but also through inter-species cooperation and trust. Such photographs, then, defined the racing pigeon as a domestic creature closely linked to their owners, tame and well-cared for, bordering on 'pet' status, and yet still a product of hard work and ingenuity.



Figure 7.38: Some 'Snapshot Competition' winners featuring children, 1930: "Daddy's pride" (top left); "The foster mother" (top right); "Where is that champion?" (bottom left); "Youngster's first toss" (bottom right)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1930 (52(2496):197); (51(2486):433); (52(2488):23); (52(2500):260)

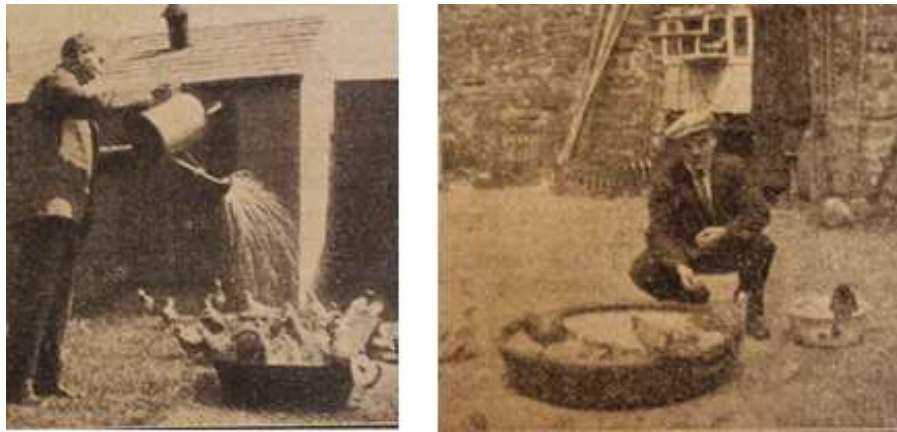


Figure 7.39: Example 'Snapshot Competition' winners, 1930; "Bath time" (left) and "Much in little" (right)

Source: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1930 (52(2498):230); (52(2493):127)

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored what McManus and Montoya (2012:400) refer to as "the co-construction of animals, humans and environments" through sport. Pigeon racers, through their calculated breeding, meticulous care, and regimented training, sought to discover blueprints for producing and 'improving' racing pigeons that reflected their own moral and physical expectations. Racers became sculptors, moulding perfect 'athletes', regularly repeating the phrase "it is the man who makes the bird" (Logan, 1924:3). The practices involved in racing built the relationship between racers and their birds, a relationship which poses an interesting challenge to – and expands definitions of – domestication. The racing pigeon was simultaneously tame and autonomous, part of the loft and an individual, disposable and honoured, a labourer and a partner, a machine and a living animal, a show bird and an athlete. Pigeon racers displayed differing degrees of attachment and detachment, supporting claims that working animals occupy an ambiguous and paradoxical theoretical space, closely integrated into human lives (Nast, 2006; Griffin, 2012). The ensuing relationship transformed both the racer and his pigeons, the two becoming almost inseparably linked and the sport becoming an embodied performance of both human and avian achievement. Indeed, pigeon racers used the term 'racer' interchangeably to refer to both human and feathered competitors.

As Ditcher (1991:foreword) claims, there was an "inter relationship...between the champion fancier and his birds. Neither is successful alone". The sport could

not be achieved without cooperation, collaboration, trust, and respect, meaning that, whilst pigeon racers emphasised their mastery and skill, the pigeons also had a significant influence on the sport and responsibility for results. Indeed, some aspects of their birds' athletic capabilities remained uncontrollable and incomprehensible, pigeon racers engaging with, but never fully understanding, scientific debates about inheritance and homing ability. The racing pigeon was, then, simultaneously inextricably linked to, and distinctly separated from, their racers. An added nuance to this fascinating sport was its surprisingly intense engagement with aesthetic questions, 'function' and 'beauty' becoming blurred. Exhibitions of racing pigeons – and discussion of their aesthetics – were a further extension of the organisation and rigour with which the sport was conducted. Racers demonstrated an interesting aesthetic consciousness, their subjective tastes and aesthetic gaze meaning that the standardisation, control, and fair play so heavily emphasised in the conduct of races was severely challenged.

The racing pigeon, it can be concluded, was a combination of 'natural' and humanly-shaped forces. It was a construct, physically and metaphorically assembled by competing definitions of 'athleticism', which fused together science and art. A pigeon race, then, was more than simply a physical contest between feathered athletes; it was a contest between competing delineations of 'athleticism', of 'beauty', and, moreover, of the racers themselves.

Chapter 8 Pigeon Geographies:

Conclusion

This thesis provides new ways of thinking about human-bird encounters under domestication, providing the first substantive geographical study of ‘pigeon geographies’. Through the examination of British pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing, it has sought to understand examples of past human-animal entanglements and the social worlds in which they were situated. It has advanced the academic study of the pigeon Fancy by uncovering previously unexplored areas, such as the practices involved in creating the ‘ideal’ fancy pigeon and the complex logistical arrangements and geographical concerns involved in long-distance racing. It also, however, makes links between the Fancy and wider society, situating pigeon exhibitions within the context of growing aesthetic scrutiny of *human* bodies, and long-distance pigeon racing within the context of increased regulation of competitive sport as a means of moral improvement. This thesis also makes significant contributions to animal geography and broader historical geography, and, therefore, occupies a very distinctive place within an emerging ‘avian geography’.

Both pigeon pastimes spanned social and geographical spectrums, not only reflecting societal relations, but also creating their own social worlds moulded around their feathered fancies. Since previous studies have explored *either* showing *or* racing, it would be easy to assume that they were two distinct pastimes. Indeed, Mott (1973:87) argues that exhibiting pigeons is “very much a separate activity, bearing no relation to pigeon racing today”. This research has, nonetheless, found that these two branches of the Fancy were closely linked. Both pastimes involved close attention to breeding domestic varieties of *Columba livia*, strong ‘fraternities’ forming around their respective practices. The detailed knowledge required of breeding, nutrition, and behavioural conditioning was, it seems, applicable to both showing and racing, as well as the patience, ingenuity, observation, and precision demonstrated by fanciers. *In theory*, then, it would have been possible to undertake both pastimes – the show season and racing season running successively – as, indeed, William Tegetmeier demonstrated in his scientific aviaries (Tegetmeier, 1868; 1871). In practice, however, fancy pigeons and racing pigeons were different breeds with divergent seasonal

requirements – one ‘performing’ whilst the other was breeding – and undoubtedly would have needed separate lofts, a drain on fanciers’ resources, time, and space. Ultimately, final preparations for the show pen appear juxtaposed to training for long-distance races, each requiring different knowledge claims about the birds’ aesthetic and athletic qualities. It is, therefore, fair to assume that the majority of competitive fanciers chose to take up just one of these pigeon pastimes. This does not, however, discount the possibility of fanciers *changing* pursuits. As Chapter 4 reveals, for instance, Mr H.C. Daniels had originally kept and raced flying varieties – during what he referred to as his “Boyhood in the Fancy” (*FW*, 1910 (42(1082):524)) – before becoming a well-regarded *fancy* Dragoon breeder and serving as NPS President in 1906 and 1907.

By investigating both showing and long-distance racing, this research has brought to light some – perhaps unanticipated – aesthetic questions involved in pigeon racing, which previous research has not discussed, identifying the politics surrounding exhibitions for racing birds. The space of the show pen, then, added further definitional layers to both racing pigeons and the racing Fancy. It also, however, became a frontier between exhibition and racing, creating tension between ornament and function in the breeding of Homer varieties for the show pen. There was, nonetheless, nothing to indicate animosity between racers and their fancy counterparts. There were, in fact, links between the two pastimes that would suggest a much broader affinity amongst the pigeon Fancy as a whole. Alfred Osman, for instance, despite his racing background, attended Pigeon Club meetings and was celebrated amongst fancy pigeon circles, his *Pigeon Book* (1910) dedicated to fancy varieties. Furthermore, John Day – founder of the London Columbarian Society (est. 1875) and early pioneer of long-distance racing (see Chapter 7) – was also reportedly well-known to fancy exhibitors and a member of the Pigeon Club, the NPS, and the United Show Homer Club (despite racers’ apparent hostility towards the breed). Indeed, there may have been more of a comradeship than a gulf between fancy and racing proponents, united by shared concerns such as pigeon health and welfare, public prejudices, expensive railway rates, council house restrictions, and wartime adversities.

As well as advancing the academic study of the pigeon Fancy, this thesis makes three contributions to the field of animal geography which help extend and deepen understandings of human-animal relationships under domestication.

Firstly, it contributes to an emerging body of work that could be labelled ‘avian geographies’, addressing the *non-mammalian* lacuna in animal geographies. It sits within a more specific gap in the literature on *domestic* birds, demonstrating both the difficulties and value of exploring human relationships with them. Not quite pets and not quite working animals, the domesticated *Columba livia* transcends classification, challenging understandings of human-animal dynamics under domestication. Domesticated pigeons for exhibition or sport occupied an ambiguous and paradoxical theoretical space, crossing over some of the categories that have framed work in animal geography. Fanciers demonstrated both emotional proximity and distance in their relationships with their birds. They commonly devoted close care and attention to the individual needs of each pigeon, treating them with respect and humility. Nevertheless, their affection for their birds came in different forms, on the one hand targeted at individual birds, and, on the other hand, directed more generally at breeds, strains, or studs. Like livestock or working animals, however, pigeons were carefully bred and trained, breeders ruthlessly ‘weeding out’ unwanted birds. Both pastimes, fanciers admitted, involved inter-species cooperation, becoming collaborative, mutually transformative encounters between fanciers and pigeons. However, at the key moment in both showing and long-distance racing, the ‘performance’ was undertaken by the birds alone, their fanciers removed – physically, at least – from both the showroom and the race. Domestic pigeons were, then, simultaneously disposable and honoured, disciplined and irrepressible, an assistant and a partner, a tool and a contestant.

Linked to this is the second contribution of this thesis to animal – and avian – geography; its distinctive focus on the birds themselves. By taking pigeons’ bodies and abilities seriously, it demonstrates the possibilities of understanding the human practices, beliefs, dispositions, and politics that (re)framed and (re)made pigeons. Domestic pigeons illustrate the diversity of ways in which humans create the meanings of animals, what Ingold (1988:10) has termed the “human construction of animality”. Both fancy pigeons and racing pigeons were subjected to forms of biopower, their bodies manipulated, moulded, and monitored. These birds were transient, pieced together and re-modelled through careful breeding, training, and (sometimes contentious) preparation. This research demonstrates the ways in which pigeon fanciers created ways of seeing and understanding their birds, and how the birds themselves became sites of

contest. The identities of both show birds and racing birds hinged on their ancestors, on previous performances, on breeding prospects, and on aesthetic or athletic potential. Fancy pigeons and racing pigeons were, then, sites for complex interactions between their past and their future; each exhibition or race was a performance representing very fleeting moments of their ephemeral 'present'. These pigeons, however, became more than simply expressions of 'ideal' aesthetic taste or athletic ability, representing human identity, power, and control. Pigeons' bodies, aesthetically and athletically, became spaces for the expression of their fanciers' identities and reputations, transformed into cultural capital and living embodiments of human ingenuity. Thus, whilst the focus of this thesis is on the birds, the pigeon fanciers remain ever-present in the discussion, emphasising their importance in orchestrating these pastimes. Pigeon fanciers, like their birds, were also redefined by their practices and the subsequent interactions with their birds, their identities moving between owner, trainer, handler, companion, co-worker, and team-mate. Through the practices of exhibiting and racing pigeons, people and pigeons became complexly connected, their identities co-produced and inseparable, each defined by the other. Thus, this research demonstrates the multiplicity and complexity of practices and encounters in the domestication of pigeons.

Thirdly, this thesis makes a distinctive *aerial* contribution to animal geographies, exploring the politics of nonhuman verticality and avian aerial life. Fancy pigeons were put on display in cages and kept captive in lofts, a very explicit and controlled form of domestication that denied them the aerial lives considered 'natural' for most birds. On the other hand, racing pigeons were subjected to a very different version of domestication, given the freedom to explore aerial spaces and utilise their flying abilities. These birds had full command of the skies, pigeon racers attempting to understand the ways in which they negotiated aerial space and the challenges – and dangers – that it posed. Pigeon racers demonstrated an aerial imagination, constructing imaginative geographies of the routes their birds took, thus linking the air with the ground below. Birds' routes also helped link distant places, nationally and internationally, thus compressing – and recasting – time-space. The aerial lives of racing pigeons were controlled by their owners, who dictated training and racing schedules. The relative freedom and mobility of the racing pigeon, nonetheless, enabled it to conquer the aerial world – except, of course, during wartime – reflecting the social and economic

aspirations of their owners. The air was a social arena in which pigeon racers' identities were performed by their birds, at a time when society in general was 'becoming aerial'. Thus, by taking the (im)mobilities of domestic pigeons seriously, this demonstrates the importance of studying animals in-the-air and aerial nonhuman lives, in order to engage with the politics of vertical space. This therefore contributes to an animal geography which, to borrow from Graham and Hewitt (2012:74), is "fully volumetric".

As well as contributing to animal geography, this thesis also has implications for broader historical geography, engaging with concepts that transcend geography. This thesis, for instance, engages with discussion of class. Both pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing historically had very strong concentrations of working-class followers, but were not restricted to the lower classes. Whilst fanciers claimed that exhibiting and racing encompassed all social classes, social distinctions were still made by the press, who celebrated the achievements of working-class fanciers in the face of misfortune. Likewise, the press boasted that the Fancy included doctors, politicians, and lawyers, and it is noticeable that most well-known figures amongst the Fancy had privileged backgrounds. Both pigeon pastimes had large middle-class followings, long-distance racing in particular attracting wealthier proponents due to the cost of sending birds to cross-Channel races. There is no doubt that, whilst working-class fanciers could compete against their wealthier counterparts, money helped considerably, enabling fanciers to own more – and better – birds, to build more spacious lofts, and to feed and care for their birds sufficiently. Nonetheless, ultimately, it was the birds who were responsible for the 'performance' in the show pen and during races. At the key moment, class became insignificant, for, if the working-class fancier had bred and prepared their birds well, they stood every chance against birds from palatial middle-class lofts. Success with pigeons, then, translated into social currency. Both working-class and middle-class pigeon fanciers adopted their feathered fancies as symbols of their identities, their birds reflecting their own aesthetic, physical, and moral aspirations at a time when society heavily emphasised 'respectability' and 'progress'.

This thesis also engages with the dynamics of historical urban economic geographies. The research begins at a time when Britain was reaping the rewards – and facing the complications – of rapid industrial and economic growth. The

expansion of both pigeon showing and pigeon racing was closely linked to the expansion of British railways and the growth of urban industrial areas. From pigeon fanciers' accounts, and through mapping shows and races, it is clear that both pastimes originated in, and were strongly linked to, urban industrial centres. These were areas where there were large concentrations of people, in order to facilitate competition and communication, but also where there were large working-class populations seeking respite from the harsh working conditions in factories and mines. After World War One, however, the decline in popularity of pigeon showing and long-distance racing was linked to Britain's interwar economic geographies. Post-war slum clearances replaced fanciers' homes with council houses, which came with strict tenancy agreements often banning the keeping of pigeons. The period was characterised by economic depression and unemployment in the heavy industries, urban working populations from old industrial areas in the north moving to the south, east, and Midlands, and taking with them their pigeons. This initially served to broaden the geographical spread of the pastimes, but may also have contributed to their decline, the pastimes requiring large concentrations of people within small geographical areas to arrange sizeable competitions and, especially in racing, to make competition fair. Thus, the histories of both pigeon showing and long-distance pigeon racing are complexly linked to Britain's industrial economic history, rising with increased prosperity from the industrial revolution and falling with interwar depression and unemployment.

Also important to this thesis is consideration of gender. Both pigeon showing and pigeon racing were predominantly male pastimes. Detailed study of fanciers' practices reveals a particular variant of masculinity in which pigeon fanciers exhibited care, patience, and precision, demonstrating both the craft of their skill and their sensitivity towards their birds. The lack of accounts of female pigeon fanciers is in keeping with trends in sports history more generally, women – particularly working-class women – being excluded from participating in leisure and sports in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The exhibition and racing of pigeons, however, challenged this. The Victorian and Edwardian woman's 'place' was in the home, but so too was the 'place' of domestic pigeons. With their husbands out at work, it was often the women who helped care for birds during the day, the oft-unsung heroes of the pastimes. Particularly in long-distance pigeon racing, there is more evidence of women participating in the

sport than previous literature suggests. Women could, it seems, be very active members of the Fancy, although their voices were not often heard.

A final significant wider theme on which this thesis draws is the development of scientific and technological innovation in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and how this contributed to a popular scientific imagination and the sociology of knowledge. Knowledge was a very powerful tool for pigeon fanciers, acquired through ritualistic practices, experiences, and observation, and passed down generations like folklore. Pigeon fanciers used instinct and experience, and yet were calculated and methodological, constructing their own scientific knowledge which they shared at shows, club meetings, and in the press.

Nonetheless, against the back drop of a surging popular interest in science in the late-nineteenth century, the pigeon Fancy became complexly entangled in scientific debate. Both pigeon exhibitors and pigeon racers engaged with Darwinian and Mendelian theories, variously accepting and rejecting scientific hypotheses for inheritance of ability and appearance. Inheritance theories, however, had little explanatory power for fanciers when environmental influences were also at play, fanciers – like scientists and geographers in the second half of the nineteenth century – struggling to separate the two. Pigeon racers in particular were plunged deep into scientific debate, exploring homing theories that challenged ideas of ‘instinct’ and ‘intentionality’ in animal behaviour, and investing greatly in the study – both amateur and professional – of meteorology. Racers, then, produced their own scientific imagination relevant to their sport. Furthermore, their sport became enmeshed in explicitly *geographical* issues, as they tried to understand the topography of birds’ flight routes and how best to obtain the accurate cartographic representation – and measurement – of the earth’s surface. Their complex relationship with time and space, thus, also saw pigeon racers implicated in technological debates about effective timing devices. The demanding mathematics that came with the territory of long-distance pigeon racing thus situated the sport amongst intellectual and scientific pursuits. Pigeon racers’ desire to regulate and standardise their sport was part of a wider trend, the increasingly competitive nature of all sports in the late-nineteenth century causing increased demand for control and precision in order to facilitate formal, standardised sport.

By considering closely the organisation of pigeon exhibitions and long-distance races – from the micro-scale of individual pigeon bodies, to fancier’s lofts, to local, regional, and national competitions – and some of the lesser-known practices involved, this thesis has shown the complexities of two pastimes which emerged during a time period characterised by a general desire to control, standardise, and regulate society. Attempts to standardise both branches of the pigeon Fancy, however, were faced by obstacles that limited their success. These pigeon pastimes – to borrow from Jerolmack’s (2013:161) study of modern-day pigeon racing – “playfully pantomimed the struggle between man and nature”. Pigeon showing was troubled by differences in aesthetic tastes, fraudulent practices of ‘faking’, and uncertainties in breeding beauty, whilst pigeon racing was hindered by inaccuracies in measuring and timing races, complications of breeding athleticism, difficulties in predicting weather, and an inability to understand the homing faculty. It was, nonetheless, the impossibility of their pursuits which seemed to attract and encourage fanciers.

In conclusion, this thesis reveals insights into what it means to write the geography of ‘the Fancy’, a geography that is best understood as intimately connected to bigger questions in British social and cultural life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It makes a distinctive claim to studying ‘pigeon geographies’ as part of emerging avian geographies, demonstrating how, through detailed study of human-pigeon relationships in exhibition and sport, much wider conclusions can be made that are relevant to both animal geography and broader historical geography. Pigeon geographies, then, not only open up new ways of thinking about human-animal relationships, but also transcend existing work in animal geography. Through the regulation of the spaces and practices that made up the more-than-human fabric of these pastimes, fanciers and their birds were drawn together, both being reconfigured and becoming closely intertwined through collaborative encounters. These two pigeon pastimes were more than simply contests of looks and stamina between feathered opponents: they were also contests between fanciers for status or personal pride; battles for better organisation and standardisation of their pastimes; and competitions between different definitions of the ‘perfect’ pigeon.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample of *The Feathered World* and *The Racing Pigeon*

Year	Volume(s)	Year	Volume(s)
<i>The Feathered World</i> (referenced as 'FW')		<i>The Racing Pigeon</i> (referenced as 'RP')	
1889	1	1898	1
1890	2-3	1899	2-3
1891	4-5	1902	8-9
1893	8-9	1904	12-13
1895	12-13	1905	14-15
1896	14-15	1908	20-21
1897	16-17	1909	22-23
1898	18-19	1910	24-25
1900	22-23	1911	26-27
1901	24-25	1914	32-33
1903	28-29	1916	35
1905	32-33	1918	37
1907	36-37	1919	38
1908	38-39	1920	39
1909	40-41	1922	41
1910	42-43	1923	42
1911	44-45	1925	44
1913	48-49	1926	45
1914	50-51	1927	46
1916	54-55	1928	47-48
1918	58-59	1929	49-50
1920	62-63	1930	51-52
1923	68-69	1932	55-56
1925	72-73	1933	57-58
1926	74-75	1935	61-62
1927	76-77	1938	67-68
1929	80-81	1939	69-70
1930	82-83		
1931	84-85		
1933	88-89		
1937	96-97		
1939	100-101		
In addition: <i>The Fanciers' Gazette and Homing World (FGHW)</i> , 1897 (Vol. 13)			

Appendix 2: Sources used from the National Railway Museum Archive (NRM)

Date	Type of document	Title	Catalogue number/Reference
13th June 1898	Circular No.200	South Eastern Railway: Pigeons killed in transit	Object No.1998-10202
1910	Van diagram	LNER Darlington C&W luggage van fitted for pigeon baskets	Drawing No.7880
1911	Van diagram	LNER Darlington C&W brake van fitted with shelves for pigeon traffic	Drawing No.11660D
7th July 1916	Circular No.609	Railway Executive Committee: Conveyance of pigeons by railway for liberation	Object No.2004-8128
1921	Poster	South Eastern and Chatham Railway Poster: The Crystal Palace Show	Object No.1979-7797
July 1927	<i>LNER Magazine</i>	"Pigeons" by 'WEG'	<i>LNER Magazine</i> , 1927 (17(7):290)
Feb 1929	<i>LMS Railway Magazine</i>	"Homing Pigeons and their Conveyance" by Pedley	<i>LMS Railway Magazine</i> , 1929 (6(2):43-47
May 1929	<i>LNER Magazine</i>	"Pigeon Traffic: 'Up North Combine'" by Naisby	<i>LNER Magazine</i> , 1929 (19(5):257)
Oct 1929	<i>LNER Magazine</i>	"A Pigeon Flight from Hitchin" by anon	<i>LNER Magazine</i> , 1929 (19(10):556)
May 1932	<i>GWR Magazine</i>	"Homing Pigeons, an interesting railway traffic" by Gillham	<i>GWR Magazine</i> , 1932 (44(5):191)

Appendix 3: Sources used from the Midland Railway Company Archive (MRC)

Date	Type of Document	Title	Catalogue number
May-June 1878	Timetables	Midland Railway Timetables, May 1 st to June 30 th 1878	RFB00710
Jul-Sept 1878	Timetables	Midland Railway Timetables, July-September 1878	RFB00711
30th Aug 1892	Circular No.600	Conveyance of Homing Pigeons	RFB05427
Oct 1893	Way bill tickets No.1-97	Midland Railway Book of 100 Counterfoils of Way Bills for Horses, Carriages, Luggage, etc. by Passenger Train; used at Mansfield from 6 th -28 th Oct 1893, tickets No.1-97	RFB26237
28th May 1909	Circular No.1124	Irregularities in the conveyance of homing pigeons and of the return empty baskets	RFB26940
Aug-Sept 1911	Timetables	Midland Railway Timetables Aug-Sept 1911	RFB00769
Oct 1911	Timetables	Midland Railway Timetables Oct 1911	RFB00770
1918	Rates book	Midland Railway Rates and Arrangements for the Conveyance of Pigeons by Passenger Train from London, 1918	RFB27267

Appendix 4: Items accumulated using eBay

Date	Item details
Annuals/Stud Books	
1909	<i>Squills Diary, Stud Book, Training Register and Almanack</i>
1910	<i>The Homing Pigeon Annual</i>
1913	<i>The Homing Pigeon Annual</i>
1915	<i>The Homing Pigeon Annual</i>
1915	<i>Squills Diary, Stud Book, Training Register and Almanack</i>
1916	<i>The Homing Pigeon Annual</i>
1929	<i>The Feathered World Year Book & Poultry Keeper's Guide for 1929</i>
1937	<i>The Feathered World Year Book & Poultry Keeper's Guide for 1937</i>
1938	<i>Squills Diary, Study Book, Training Register and Almanack</i>
<i>The Feathered World's 'Aids to Amateurs' cards</i>	
1908	No.1 Magpie*
1908	No.2 Trumpeter
1908	No.3 Nun
1908	No.4 Black Laced Blondinette
1908	No.5 Dragoon*
1908	No.6 Show Homer*
1908	No.7 Pouter & Pigmy Pouter*
1908	No.8 Blue Owl
1908	No.9 Long-faced Tumbler
1908	No.10 Almond Tumbler*
1908	No.11 Jacobin*
1908	No.12 Swallow
1909	No.13 Cumulet*
1909	No.14 Fantail*
1909	No.15 Tippler
1909	No.16 Carrier*
1910	No.17 Norwich Cropper
1910	No.18 Turbit*
1910	No.19 Exhibition Homer*
1910	No.20 Runt
1910	No.21 Archangel
1910	No.22 Antwerp
1910	No.23 Barb
1911	No.25 Working Homer
1911	No.26 Long-faced Black Bald Tumbler*
1911	No.27 Dragoon
1914	No.35 Long-faced Black Mottle Tumbler
1914	No.36 Satinette*
1914	No.38 Black Self Tumbler

1914	No.39 Blondinette*
1914	No.40 Modena
*cards referenced in this thesis	
F & J Smith's <i>Fowls, Pigeons, & Dogs</i> cigarette cards	
1908	No.6 Jacobin
1908	No.8 Fantail*
1908	No.9 Homer
1908	No.10 Magpie
1908	No.12 Norwich Cropper*
1908	No.17 Dragoon*
1908	No.18 Blondinette
1908	No.19 Trumpeter
1908	No.20 Swallow
1908	No.28 Long-faced Tumbler*
1908	No.31 Carrier*
*cards referenced in this thesis	
Cope Bros.' <i>Pigeons</i> cigarette cards	
1926	No.1 Turbiteen
1926	No.2 Trumpeter*
1926	No.3 Blue Pouter*
1926	No.4 Jacobins
1926	No.5 Barb*
1926	No.6 Carrier
1926	No.7 Blue Dragoon
1926	No.8 Nun
1926	No.9 Satinette
1926	No.10 Scotch Fantail*
1926	No.11 Runt
1926	No.12 Mottle Tumbler
1926	No.13 English Owl
1926	No.14 Saddle Tumbler*
1926	No.15 Turbit*
1926	No.16 Pigmy Pouters
1926	No.17 Flying Homer*
1926	No.18 Magpies
1926	No.19 Vizor
1926	No.20 Archangel*
1926	No.21 Blondinette
1926	No.22 Oriental Roller
1926	No.23 Short-faced Antwerp
1926	No.24 Almond Tumbler*
1926	No.25 Swallow

*cards referenced in this thesis	
Ogdens <i>Racing Pigeons</i> cigarette cards	
1931	No.1 A breeding pigeon
1931	No.2 A champion's home
1931	No.3 A Cheshire champion*
1931	No.4 'Dark Japan'
1931	No.5 'Dauntless'
1931	No.6 Lord Dewar's favourite
1931	No.7 A Dundee life-saver
1931	No.8 An East Anglian champion
1931	No.9 Entering the loft
1931	No.10 'Faroe Pride'*
1931	No.11 'Flying Scotchman'
1931	No.12 A gallant messenger
1931	No.13 A gas mask for carrier-pigeons
1931	No.14 One of H.M. the King's pigeons
1931	No.15 An ideal pigeon-loft
1931	No.16 Interior of an R.A.F. pigeon-loft
1931	No.17 An Irish record holder
1931	No.18 'Little Hope'
1931	No.19 A Liverpool aristocrat
1931	No.20 L.N.E.R pigeon-van*
1931	No.21 A London champion*
1931	No.22 Marennes winner, 1928
1931	No.23 A mobile pigeon-loft with the British Army in France
1931	No.24 The nursery
1931	No.25 The only survivor
1931	No.26 P.C. Crabbe's prize-winner
1931	No.27 A pigeon journalist
1931	No.28 Pigeon with message carrier
1931	No.29 Pigeons ready for liberation
1931	No.30 'Pilot's luck'
1931	No.31 Pons winner, 1929
1931	No.32 'Pride of the East'
1931	No.33 A record price pigeon*
1931	No.34 Receiving pigeons at sea
1931	No.35 Attaching race ring*
1931	No.36 Releasing a pigeon from an aeroplane
1931	No.37 Releasing pigeons*
1931	No.38 'Sceptre'
1931	No.39 A Scottish champion
1931	No.40 Sending from a submarine
1931	No.41 'Shetland Express'

1931	No.42 Special pigeon-racing clock*
1931	No.43 'Triumph'
1931	No.44 A very gallant bird
1931	No.45 A war hero
1931	No.46 'White Hope'*
1931	No.47 A working man's champion*
1931	No.48 A working man's success
1931	No.49 Writing a message
1931	No.50 A Yorkshire champion
*cards referenced in this thesis	
Mr Gregory's Letters	
6th Jan 1898	Letter from Knowle, name illegible*
29th Jan 1900	Letter from Cork, name illegible
1st Jan 1901	Letter from Charles D Robinson, Oldham*
4th Jan 1901	Letter from Charles D Robinson, Oldham
16th Jan 1901	Letter from James McKinney, Co. Antrim
28th Jan 1901	Letter from Robert Humble, Gateshead
15th Feb 1901	Letter from High Barnet, name illegible
16th Feb 1901	Letter from Albert Beale, Hinckley
17th Feb 1901	Letter from Charles Cotterill, Congleton
18th Feb 1901	Letter from Peter Simpson, Glasgow
20th Feb 1901a	Letter from Glasgow, Hugh Smithe*
20th Feb 1901b	Letter from C. Barnes, Sheffield*
27th Feb 1901	Letter from O. Rogers, Kent*
*letters referenced in this thesis	

Appendix 5: Locations of clubs holding shows during November 1895-1935, shown in figure 4.6

Source: *The Feathered World*, 1895-1935

1895

Aberdare	Cartmel
Abingdon	Caterham
Accrington	Chelmsford
Adlington	Cheltenham
Alloa	Chichester
Anstruther	Choppington
Arbroath	Church Gresley
Armadales	Churchtown
Ashington	City of Liverpool
Aspatia	Cleator Moor
Bacup	Cleckheaton
Banbury	Coldstream
Barnsley	Coventry
Barnstaple	Cramlington
Basingstoke	Crewe
Bathgate	Crossgates (Leeds)
Bedlington	Cupar-Fife
Belfast	Dalton in Furness
Belper	Dalton in Furness
Bexley	Darwen
Bideford	Dearnley
Birmingham	Deptford
Blackburn	Desborough
Blaina	Devonport
Blue Bell (Newcastle-on-Tyne)	Dewsbury
Blyth	Dunfermline
Bodmin	East Calder
Bradford	East Grinstead
Bradford	East Kilbride
Bradford West	Eastbourne
Bridlington	Edinburgh
Bristol	Exeter
Brotton	Falkirk
Burnley	Farnworth
Burton (Westmoreland)	Ferndale
Burton-on-Trent	Flamborough
Buxburn	Forfar
Cambridge	Forres
Canterbury	Fylde
Cardiff	Galashiels
Carlisle	Garstang
Carmarthen	Glamorganshire

Glasgow
Glossop
Gloucester
Great Horton
Greenock
Grimsby
Guisborough
Haddington
Halifax
Hamilton
Haverfordwest
Hayfield
Henley-on-Thames
Hinckley
Holmfirth
Holt
Honley
Hucknall
Huthwaite
Ilkley
Inverness
Ipswich
Jarrow, Hebburn, Tyneside
Jedburgh
Keighley
Kelso on Tweed
Kilbarchan
Kilburn
Kingston-on-Thames
Kirkburton
Kirton-in-Lindsey
Lampeter
Lancaster
Lanercost
Launceston
Leamington
Leeds
Leicester
Leigh
Lesmahagow
Littleborough
Liverpool
Llanelly
Lochgelly
London and Provincial
Long Sutton
Longridge

Longwood
Loughborough
Lowestoft
Manchester
Markinch
Marlpool
Maryport
Milnthorpe
Morrison
Newcastle
Newnham
Normanton
Nottingham
Oakham
Oldham
Oxford
Paignton
Paisley and Renfrewshire
Pembroke Dock
Pitlochry
Plymouth
Portsmouth
Ramsey
Reading
Redhill
Ripon
Rothwell
Sanquhar
Scarborough
Seaham
Sedbergh
Selby
Selkirkshire
Sheffield
Smethwick and Handsworth
Smithy Bridge
South Molton
South Shields
St Albans
St Ives
St John's and Lewisham
Stafford
Stirling
Stockport
Stonehouse
Stratford (Essex)
Street

Sunderland
Swansea
Thurso
Tiverton
Tottenham
Tottington
Turriff
Walkley
Walthamstow
Watford
West Kent
West London Kensington

Whitby
Wigan
Wigtownshire
Windermere
Windhill
Windsor
Wisbey
Wishaw
Woolwich, Greenwich, and
Blackheath
York

1905

Alston
Arbroath
Aspatria
Avonbridge
Ayr
Banff
Barnard Castle
Bathgate
Bedale
Belfast
Belper
Birmingham
Blyth
Bodmin
Bolton
Brackley
Bradwell
Braintree
Bridgwater
Bristol
Bromsgrove
Builth Wells
Burton-on-Trent
Caithness
Camberwell Baths
Cambridge
Cannock
Canterbury
Cardiff
Cardigan
Carlisle

Carmarthen
Carnoustie
Castleford
Caterham
Chapel-en-le-Frith
Cheadle
Cheshunt
Chippenham
Clevedon
Clydach
Congleton
Consett
Cupar
Cwmpengraig
Darley Dale
Darlington
Doncaster
Dover
Droylsden
Dublin
Dudley
Dumbarton
Dunbar
Dunstable
Edinburgh (Scottish Met)
Egremont
Erdington
Exeter
Exeter and Devon
Fauldhouse
Fleckney

Folkestone
Galashiels
Girvan
Glastonbury
Gloucester
Golcar
Grantham
Gravesend
Great Missenden
Great Yarmouth
Guisborough
Hanley
Hathershaw
Haverfordwest
Hayfield
Hayle
Hertford
Hinckley
Honley
Horsham
Hugglescote
Hull
Inverness
Ipswich
Kegworth
Keighley
Kelso
Keynsham
King's Lynn
Kirby Moorside
Kirkcaldy
Kirkcudbright
Lancercost
Launceston
Leeds
Leighton and Linslade
Lesmahagow
Llandilo
Llanelly
Louth
Lowestoft
Lye
Mablethorpe
Maindee
Malmesbury
March
Margate

Melbourne
Melton Mowbray
Milnthorpe
Morecambe
Motherwell
Mountain Ash
Mountsorrel
Narberth
Nelson
Nenthead
New Cumnock
New Mills
Newark
Newnham
Newport
North Tawton
Northfield
Nottingham
Oakham
Old Cumnock
Ormskirk
Oswestry
Oxford
Pathead
Peak Dale
Peak Forest (Stockport)
Pickering
Plymouth
Polesworth
Reading
Redhill
Reigate
Richmond and Twickenham
Rothesay
Rushden
Ryton-on-Tyne
Sanquhar
Scarborough
Seaton Burn
Seaton Terrace
Selby
Selkirkshire
ShIPLEY
Sidmouth
Sittingbourne
Sleaford
Smethwick

Southall
Spalding
Spen Valley
St Mary Church
Stanningley
Stirling
Stockton
Stockton on Tees
Stonehouse
Stourbridge
Sudbury
Sutton-in-Ashfield
Swindon
Taunton
Tewkesbury
Thornton
Thringstone
Thurso
Tonbridge
Tring
Tunbridge Wells

Walker
Walsall
Walthamstow
Watford
Welshpool
Westminster
Weston-super-Mare
Whitehaven
Wigton
Wilmslow
Wimborne
Wirksworth
Wiveliscombe
Wolverhampton
Woodville
Woolwich
Worcester
Wroughton
Wyke
York

1915

Aberdare
Alderley Edge
Astwood Bank
Bath
Blackburn
Bristol
Camberne
Carlisle
Charlotteville
Chatburn
Cleator Moor
Cockermouth
Colnevalley
Coxhoe
Croydon
Crymmych
Cymlllynfell and Cwmtwrch
Derby
Dewsbury
East Hull
Glasgow
Gloucestershire

Gravesend
Grimsby
Hereford
Hetton-le-Hole
Huddersfield
Ilkeston
Ipswich
Isle of Wight
Keighley
Kendal
Kettering
Kidwelly
Kings Lynn
Kirkby-in-Ashfield
London Camberwell Baths
Maindee
Mardy
Margate
Mid-Rhondda
Muirkirk
Neath
Newnham

Newquay
Northwood
Paisley
Pontypool
Quarry Bank
Rawtenstall
Resolven
Ripley
Romford
Sacriston
Scunthorpe
Silsden

Skelmanthorpe
Stonehouse
Stratford and E. London
Swansea
Urmston
Wadebridge
Wellington
West Auckland
Winsford
Woodsetton
Youlgrave

1925

Airdrie
Alfreton
Alsager
Anstey
Appleby
Arbroath
Arnold and Daybrook
Ashburton
Astwood Bank
Backworth
Barnstaple
Barrhead
Barton-on-Humber
Baslow
Bedford
Beith
Belper
Bideford
Bishop Auckland
Blackheath
Bodmin
Bolton
Bovey Tracey
Bridgend
Bristol
Bromsgrove
Buckingham
Budleigh Salterton
Cadishead
Callington
Canterbury

Cardigan
Castle Douglas
Caterham
Chichester
Chippenham
Chislehurst
Clitheroe
Cockermouth
Compstall Mellor
Consett
Crawcrook
Crawley
Crowthorne
Crymmych
Cullompton
Darley Dale
Dartmouth
Delph
Denton
Deptford
Derby
Dove Holes
Dowlais
Dubmire
Dunbar
Dunoon
Dunstable
Dunston-one-Tyne
East Dereham
East Manchester
East-Linton

Eastville
Eccleshill
Edgware
Edinburgh
Edmonton
Enfield
Exmouth
Farnham
Fauldhouse
Flyingdales
Galashiels
Galston
Grantham
Gravesend
Hadleigh
Halesowen
Hamilton
Harverfordwest
Hawes
Heanor
Hetton-le-Hole
Highbridge
Histon
Hitchin
Hove
Ibstock
Ipswich
Jump
Keighley
Kelty and Blairadam
Kendal
Kilbarchan
Kimberley
King's Lynn
Kirkby Stephen
Kirkcaldy
Kirkconnel
Leek
Leiston
Liskeard
Llandyssul
Louth
Macclesfield
Maenclochog
Maidstone
Malton
Margate

Matlock
Melksham
Merthyr Vale
Midsomer Norton
Minehead
Mossley
Muirkirk
Neath
New Mills
Newton Abbot
Northampton
Norwich
Okehampton
Otley
Oxford
Padgate
Paisley
Panteg
Pembrey and Burry Point
Pembroke
Penclawdd
Penrith
Perran-ar-Worthal
Peterborough
Plymouth
Ponteland
Pontnewydd
Pontyclun
Pontypool
Port Sunlight
Portsmouth
Rickmansworth
Rochdale
Runcorn
Scarborough
Slough
South Molton
Southall
Southend
Southwell
Spalding
St Austell
St Columb
Stakeford
Stonehouse
Stranraer
Sunderland

Swindon
Tadcaster
Tavistock
Teignmouth
Tideswell
Totley
Totnes
Truro
Ulverston
Upwell
Walworth
Wareham
Warrington
Waunarlwydd
Wellington
West Kirby
Westhoughton

Weston-super-Mare
Weymouth
Whitstable
Whitby
Wickersley
Windermere
Wirksworth
Woking
Wokingham
Wolverhampton
Wood Green
Working
Workington
Yate
Yeovil
York

1935

Barrhead
Bath
Bideford
Birmingham
Blackpill
Bodmin
Bovey Tracey
Bristol
Cardigan
Chudleigh
Cockermouth
Consett
Cullompton
Cupar
Dartmouth
Dove Holes
Edinburgh
Galashiels
Glasgow
Hebden Bridge
Ivybridge
King's Lynn
Maidstone

Northwood
Okehampton
Paignton
Polesworth
Pontypool
Ramsgate
Redditch
Rhondda
Ryedale
Scisset
Sidmouth
Stourbridge
Taunton
Tavistock
Totnes
Uxbridge
Watford
Wells
Weymouth
Whitby
Wisbech
Woodbridge
York

Appendix 6: Specialist pigeon clubs in the late-nineteenth century

Sources: *The Feathered World*, 1890 (2(28):23); Fulton (1895:520)

Society	Date formed	Secretary 1890 (and location)	Secretary 1895 (and location)
Turbit Club	1880	Mr Parkin (York)	Rev. Lumley (Surrey)
Barb Club	1885	Mr Firth (Dewsbury)	Mr Coton (York)
Carrier Club	1885	Mr Hammock (Essex)	Mr Allsop (Birmingham)
Magpie Club	1885	Mr Warner (Essex)	Mr Winter (Oxford)
Dragoon Club	1886	Mr Palgrave Page (Kent)	Mr J Smith (London)
Fantail Club	1886 (reformed 1889)	Mr Lee (Falkirk)	Mr Harmsworth (Whitby)
Long-faced Tumbler Club	1886	Mr Landon (Birmingham)	Mr Landon (Birmingham)
Short-faced Tumbler Club	1886	Mr Ross (Islington)	Mr Towndrow (London)
Show Homer Club	1886	Mr Higham (Burnley)	Mr Turner (Hull)
Jacobin Club	1887	Mr Wilkins (London)	Mr Pillans (Lanarkshire)
Nun Club	1888	Mr Whittaker (Essex)	Mr Miller (Norwich)
Pouter Club	1889	England: Mr Leighton (London) Scotland: Mr Thornburn (Ayr)	Mr Lindsey (Lanarkshire)
Archangel Club	1893	Mr Brown (Peckham)	Mr Wiltshire (Surrey)
Cropper Club	1893	Mr Boreham (Colchester)	Mr Cooper (Norwich)
United Show Homer Club	1888	ND	Mr Della Rocca (London)
Antwerp Club	1890	ND	Mr Hardaker (Bradford)
Tippler Club	1891	ND	Mr Maskery Bebb (Staffs)
Owl Club	1892	ND	Mr Branston (Surrey)
Oriental Frills Club	1893	ND	Mr Machin (Birmingham)

Appendix 7: Specialist pigeon clubs, 1929 and 1937

Sources: *The Feathered World Year Book*, 1929 (pp24-25), 1937 (pp259-60)

Society	Secretary 1929 (and location)	Secretary 1937 (and location)
Antwerp	R. Brewis (Co. Durham)	H. Driver (Keighley)
Antwerp Smerle	ND	J. Dunham (Brighton)
Archangel	Thompson (Cambridge)	Thompson (Cambridge)
Barb	C. Griffin (Carmarthen)	C. Griffin (Carmarthen)
Bohemian Brunner	-	Pritchard (Gloucester)
Carrier	S. Holmberg (Herts)	Warwick (Luton)
Cumulet	W. Proctor Smith (Manchester)	ND
Dragoon	Smith (London)	T. Ambrose (Leicester)
Fancy Blue Bar and Chequer	Biggar (Scotland)	W. Prentice (Lanarkshire)
Fantail	Todd (Kent)	H. Badham (Kent)
Scottish Fantail	ND	T. Smith (Glasgow)
Holle Cropper	D. Parvin (Selby)	D. Parvin (Selby)
Exhibition Flying Homer	P. Taylor (Doncaster)	P. Taylor (Doncaster)
United Exhibition Homer	ND	W. Denham (Rotherham)
Genuine Flying Homer	J. Bebb (Blackpool)	E. Brooksbank (Harrogate)
Ideal Genuine Homer	J. Walker (Huddersfield)	ND
Northern Counties Show Homer	F. Nicholl (Southport)	S. Anderton (Ormskirk)
Show Homer	H. Heppel (London)	G. Pelling (London)
Scottish Show and Exhibition Homer	D. Ferguson (Glasgow)	J. Ramsay (Falkirk)
Western Counties Show and Exhibition Homer	H. Jaggard (Bristol)	G. Persall (Bristol)
Jacobin	H. Wilkinson (Cheshire)	C. Sharpe Magee (Pontefract)
Scottish Jacobin	J. Mundell (West Lothian)	J. Mundell (West Lothian)

Magpie	W. Machin (Yorkshire)	G. Cousins (March)
Scottish Magpie	ND	G. Cunningham (Dunbar)
Martham	Shatford (Rugby)	Shatford (Rugby)
Modena	W. Holmes (Middlesex)	W. Holmes (Middlesex)
National Modena	ND	N. Sharp (Yorkshire)
Scottish Modena	Wright (East Lothian)	ND
Norwich Cropper	J. Hall (Gorleston)	R. Doig (Nottingham)
British Nun	J. Neal (Bedford)	J. Neal (Bedford)
Bath Nun	V. Fielding (Bath)	C. Hale (Bath)
Sussex Nun	ND	C. Haryett (Sussex)
Oriental Frill	G. Hope (Hartlepool)	G. Hope (Hartlepool)
African Owl	J. McCreath (Berwick)	J. McCreath (Berwick)
English Owl	W. Smith (Essex)	W. Smith (Essex)
Pigmy Cropper and Horseman	Laird (Johnstone)	Laird (Johnstone)
Pigmy Pouter	H. Leighton (Surrey)	H. Leighton (Surrey)
Pouter	Jupe (Dulwich)	Jupe (Dulwich)
Scottish Pouter	T. Smith (Kirkcaldy)	ND
Polish Lynx	ND	G. Drake (Devon)
Midland Roller	J. Drinkwater (Birmingham)	J. Drinkwater (Birmingham)
National Roller	ND	W. Pensom (Birmingham)
Runt	J. Robinson (Oxon)	J. Sears (Surrey)
Scandaroon	Mansell (Oxon)	ND
National Tippler	W. Tyler (Ludlow)	ND
National Tippler Union	J. Hathaway (Bristol)	J. Hathaway (Bristol)
Wales and West Show Tippler	Evans (Swansea)	C. Whitford (Swansea)
Welsh National Flying Tippler	Evans (Swansea)	C. Harrison (Swansea)

All England Tippler and Tumbler	G. Liddall (Sheffield)	J. Holland (Sheffield)
Show Tippler	ND	D. Hunter (Stoke)
Tippler and Tumbler	ND	Guise (London)
Trumpeter	G. Liddall (Sheffield)	ND
L.F. Self Tumbler	E. Jeffries (Surrey)	Brand (London)
L.F. Bath Tumbler	V. Fielding (Bath)	H. Hale (Bath)
Bald and Beard Tumbler	H. Pole (Bristol)	H. Pole (Bristol)
British Whiteside	G. Pearson (Halifax)	D. Murdock (Glasgow)
London L.F. Tumbler	ND	A. Goodwin (London)
Scottish National L.F. Tumbler	D. Jarvis (Edinburgh)	D. Jarvis (Edinburgh)
Scottish Tumbler	J. Edington (Kilbirnie)	J. Edington (Kilbirnie)
Short-faced Tumbler	T. Grindey (Lancashire)	ND
Scottish S.F. Tumbler	ND	C. Dougan (Paisley)
S.F. Imperial Tumbler	H. Passman (Easingwold)	H. Passman (Easingwold)
Turbit	Sparrow (London)	R. Vasey (Sunderland)
Variety	Woods (Tottenham)	Woods (Tottenham)

Appendix 8: Example list of clubs holding races during June 1899

Sources: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899

1899

Aberdeen and Dis HS	Blackburn FC
Accrington and Dis HS	Blackpool HS
Ackworth HS	Bloxwich HS
Ainsdale HS	Blythswood HS
Airedale and Dis FC	Bolton and Dis HS
Aldershot and Dis HS	Bolton Central HS
Alexandra Palace HS	Bonnyrigg FC
Altrincham Central FC	Bournemouth FC
Alverthorpe HS	Bournemouth HPS
Armley and Wortley HS	Bow and Dis FC
Ashton-on-Mersey and Dis FC	Brandon Colliery HS
Ashton-under-Lyne	Briercliffe HS
Ashton-under-Lyne HS	Brierley Hill FC
Atherton and Dis HS	Brierley Hill HS
Avondale HC	Brighton FC
Ayr Burns HPS	Bristol and Dis HS
Bagthorpe HS	Bromley HPS
Bamfurlong and Dis HS	Burbage and Dis HS
Barnard Castle HS	Burney West End HS
Baroness Windsor HS	Burnham HS
Barrowford HS	Burnley Castle HS
Basingstoke and Dis FC	Burnley W End HS
Batley and Dis FC	Burscough FC
Beaufort HS	Bury and Dis FC
Beckenham HS	Buxton and Dis HS
Bedford HS	Buxton HS
Bedlington HS	Byker and Dis HS
Bee-Hive HS (Gateshead)	Carlinghow FC
Belfast HPS	Carnforth and Dis HS
Belgrave FC	Castle Hill HS
Belper FC	Castleford and Dis FC
Belvedere HPS	Cathays United HS
Berwick-on-Tweed FC	Central Counties FC
Berwick-on-Tweed HS	Chatham HS
Bingley and Dis FC	Cheadle and Dis HS
Birch Tree FC (Brierley Hill)	Chelsea FC
Birkdale Boundary FC	Chesham HS
Birkenhead and Dis HS	Chester and Dis HS
Birkenhead Central FC	Chesterfield and Dis FC
Birkenhead Wednesday HS	Chesterfield and Dis HS
Black Boy FC	Chickenley and Dis HS
Blackbrook HS	Chippenham and Dis FC
Blackburn and Dis HS	Chorley and Dis HS

Church Gresley and Dis HS	Earsdon and Dis HS
City of Liverpool FC	Easington Lane FC
City of Sheffield HS	East End HS
Clapham HS	East End Turf Hotel Burnley
Cleveland FC	East Ham HS
Clitheroe FC	East Reading FC
Clitheroe HS	Ellsemere Port and Dis FC
Clydesdale HPS	Elton HS
Colne and Dis HS	Erith HS
Congleton Central FC	Euxton Col. S
Congleton Central HS	Ferndale FC
County Down HPS	Finsbury Park FC
County of Middlesex HS	Fleetwood HS
Cramlington Dis HS	Folkestone and Dis HPS
Craven HS	Frome and Dis FA
Crawford Village HS	Garston HS
Crawshawbooth HS	Gateshead and Dis FC
Crewe HS	Gateshead and Dis HS
Cronkeyshaw HS	Gee Cross and Dis HS
Crosshills and Dis HS	Glamorgan and Monmouth HS
Croston CS	Glamorganshire and
Croydon HS	Monmouthshire HS
Crystal Palace FC	Glossop, Hadfield, and Dis FC
Crystal Palace N Rd FC	Goole HS
Dairy HS	Gorton and Dis HS
Dartford FC	Gorton Central FC
Dartford Working Mens HS	Grapes, Ipswich HS
Darvel FC	Great Grimsby HS
Darwen Amateur HS	Great Harwood HS
Denton and Dis HS	Great Yarmouth FC
Denton HS	Greatham HS
Derby Working Mens HS	Grosvenor FC
Derbyshire Hill FC	Halifax Dis HS
Derwent Valley HS	Hampshire and Dis HS
Dewsbury and Dis FC	Harton Victoria HS
Dingle HS	Haslingden and Dis HS
Dowlais A HS	Hayfield FC
Draycott Dis HS	Hayfield FC
Driffield HS	High Wycombe HS
Dronfield and Dis HS	Hightown and Dis HS
Dublin FC	Hitchin and Dis HS
Dudley HS	Hollinsend FC
Dunstable and Dis CS	Hoole HS
Dunstall Park HS	Horbury and Dis
Eagley HS	Horwick HS
Earl Shilton Dis FC	Huddersfield and Dis HS
Earlestown HS	Huddersfield Central FC

Hunting and Godmanchester HS	Lowestoft and Dis HS
Idle and Dis FC	Ludlow HS
Ilford FC	Macclesfield and Dis HS
Ilkeston Dis HS	Machen and Rudry HS
Innerleven HS	Maerdy HPS
Irvine HS	Maindee and Dis HS
Islington HS	Malvern and Dis FC
Jarrow Alexandra	Manchester Central HS
Jarrow and Dis HS	Manchester HS
Jersey FC	Marquis of Salisbury HS
Junction Inn HS	Maryport and Dis HS
Keighley and Dis HS	Mealsgate HS
Kendal and Dis HS	Melton Mowbray HS
Kendal FC	Mersey FC
Kidderminster AFC	Mexbrough and Dis HS
Kilmarnock Portland HC	Middleton HS
Kingston Dis FC	Mid-Gloucestershire FC
Kingstone and Dis FC	Midland HL
Kingston-on-Thames HS	Midlothian Dis HS
Kirkley HS	Mile End HPS
Lancaster and Dis HS	Milnthorpe HS
Larkhall FC	Monkewearmouth FC
Leeds HS	Monkwearmouth HS
Leicester and County FC	Moor Park HS (Preston)
Leicester North End HS	Morecambe HS
Leicester South-End HS	Morley and Dis FC
Leigh and Dis FC	Morley and Dis HS
Leigh and Dis HS	Morley HS
Leyland and Dis FC	Morpeth HS
Leytonstone HS	Mount Street FC (Southport)
Linthwaite Fanciers HC	Mountain Ash HS
Linthwaite HC	Mountain Ash Novice FC
Linthwaite HS	Mountain Ash Novice HS
Little Lever and Dis HS	Murton and Dis HS
Live and Let Live FC	N.W. London
Liverpool HS	Nantwich FC
Liverpool United HS	Nelson and Dis HS
Liverpool Wed HS	New Ferry and Dis HS
Llanelly and Dis HS	New Mills FC
Lockwood and Dis HS	New Southgate Dis FC
Lofthouse Dis HS	Newark and Dis FC
London CS	Newcastle
Longridge HS	Newcastle A HS
Longriggend HS	Newcastle C HS
Loughborough HS	Newcastle HS
Low Moor and Dis FC	Newcastle-on-Tyne Trafalgar HS
Lower Broughton HS	Newport and Dis HS

Norden HS	S.W. Manchester HS
North Middlesex FC	Salford FC
North of Ireland FC	Scotland Gate and Dis HS
North Oldham FC	Seaforth HS
North Ward HS	Seaham Harbour and Dis HS
North-west London HS	Seaham Harbour and Swine Lodge
Norwood FC	Seaham Harbour HS
Notts FC	Sheffield and Dis HS
Notts HS	ShIPLEY and Dis FC
Nuneaton and Dis HS	Shrewsbury Dis FC
Oldham Centre FC	Shuttleworth HC
Oliver Cromwell HS (Lancs)	Shuttleworth HS
Ormskirk and Dis HS	Silsden and Dis HS
Ormskirk East End HS	Sirhowy FS
Ossett and Dis HS	Skelmersdale and Dis HS
Ossett Common and Dis	Skerton HS
Ossett Town HS	Slaithwaite FC
Oswaldtwistle and Dis HS	Slaithwaite HS
Ovendon Colliery HS	South Bank HPS
Oxhill and Dis HS	South Birkdale HS
Paddington and Bayswater HS	South Shields HS
Paddock FC	Southall CS
Pendleton HS	Southern Counties FC
Percy Main HS	Southport and Dis HS
Plymouth and Dis FC	Southwark Park HS
Pontypool and Dis HS	South-west Manchester FC
Pontypridd HS	Spen Valley and Dis FC
Port and Rhondda Valley HS	Spen Valley HS
Portsmouth CS	Spotland HS
Potteries CS	St Clair HC
Poynton HS	St Helens HS
Prescot HC	St James's HPS
Preston and Dis HS	St Neot's HS
Preston HS	Staffordshire N Rd FC
Quebec HS	Stalybridge Centre FC
Queensbury and Dis HS	Stalybridge HS
Radcliffe and Dis HS	Stanmore HS
Reading CS	Stockport & Dis HS
Redcar and Coatham HS	Stockton-on-Tees HS
Ribblesdale HS	Stone and Dis HS
Ripponden Dis HS	Stoney Stanton FC
Roath and Moor HS	Stratford HPS
Rochdale HS	Stratford-on-Avon HS
Rossendale HS	Stretford HS
Rothwell HS	Stroud FC
Runcorn HS	Sunderland FC
Ryecroft HS	

Sutton (Surrey) HS	Wingate HS
Sutton-in-Ashfield and Dis FC	Winton FC
Swindon FC	Wolverhampton Central HS
Swine Lodge HS	Woodford and Dis FC
Sydenham and Dis HS	Woodford and Dis HS
Teesside HS	Worcester United FC
Teignmouth HS	Wordsley and Dis HC
Thanet HS	Workington and Dis HS
Tottington and Dis HS	Worksop and Retford HS
Tow Law HS	Wrexham and Dis HS
Tyneside FC	Yeadon and Dis HS
Uddingstone and Bothwell FC	York and Dis HS
Uttoxeter FC	Ystalyfera and Dis HS
Wakefield and Dis HS	Ystrad and Dis HS
Wallsend and Dis HS	
Walsall and Dis HS	
Waltham Cross FC	
Walthamstow and Dis HS	
Walworth HS	
Wandsworth HS	
Warrington and Dis HS	
Warrington Working Mens FC	
Warwick Antelope FC	
Watford FC	
Wavertree HS	
Wearside FC	
West Croydon HS	
West End City HS	
West Hartlepool HS	
West London FC	
West of Scotland FC	
Westbourne FC	
West-End City HS	
Western Valleys HS	
Westhoughton HS	
Weymouth FC	
Wharfedale and Dis FC	
Wharfedale HS	
Whittington Moor HS	
Widnes HS	
Willaston (in Wirral) HS	
Willesden HS	
Willington (Durham) and Dis HS	
Wilts FC	
Windermere FC	
Windsor HS	
Wingate and Dis HS	

Appendix 9: Location of federations and combines holding races during June 1899-1939, shown in figure 6.20

Sources: *The Racing Pigeon*, 1899-1939

1899

East Lancashire Fed	Northumberland and Durham Fed
East London Fed	Ramsbottom and Dis Fed
East Midland Fed	Rossendale Fed
Lancashire Central Fed	South-East Lancs Fed
Liverpool Fed HS	Stockport and Dis Fed
London N Rd Fed	West Cheshire and North Wales Sat Fed
Manchester and Dis Fed	West Cheshire Fed
North East Counties Fed	West Lancashire Sat Fed
North Lancashire and Westmorland Fed	Yorkshire Fed
North-East and East Lancashire Fed	

1909

Ashton, Stalybridge, and Dis Fed	Leicester Borough North Road Fed
Barnsley Fed	Leicestershire North Road Fed
Bath and West of England Fed	Leigh, Atherton, and Tyldesley
Bristol North Road Fed	Liverpool and Dis Fed
Burton and Dis Fed	London Fed
Chester-le-Street Fed	London N Rd Fed
Chorley Dis Fed	Manchester and Dis Fed
Derbyshire Fed	Mid-Cheshire Fed
Earlestown Amalgamation	Mid-Durham Fed
East Anglian Fed	Monmouthshire North Road Fed
East Cumberland Fed	NE Counties Fed
East Lancashire Fed	NE Lancashire Fed
East London Fed	Newcastle Fed
East Scotland Fed	North Lancashire and Westmoreland Fed
Exeter Fed	North Wales Fed
Fifeshire Fed	North Yorks and South Durham Fed
Furness and Cumberland Fed	Northamptonshire Fed
Glasgow and Dis Fed	Northumberland Fed
Gloucestershire and Dis North Road Fed	NW Lancashire Fed
Heavy Woollen Fed	NW Yorkshire Fed
Hunwick and Newfield Amalgamation	Oldham Amalgamation of Homing Societies
Kent Fed	Radcliffe Ltd
Lanarkshire Fed	Ramsbottom Fed
Lancashire Central Fed	Scottish Central Fed
Leeds and Dis Fed	

SE Lancashire and Lancashire
Central Fed
SE Lancs Sat Fed
Sheffield and Dis Fed
Sheffield Fed
South Cheshire Fed
South Coast Fed
South Yorkshire Fed
Southern Counties Fed
Southport and Dis Fed
South-Western Fed
St Helens and District Fed
Stockport and District Fed
SW Lancashire Fed

Tyne and Derwent Valley Fed
Wakefield Fed
Warwickshire Fed
West Cheshire and North Wales Fed
West Coast Fed
West Cumberland Fed
West Durham Fed
West Lancashire Saturday
West Yorks Fed
Wigan Amalgamation
Wigan and District Fed
Wigan Federation Pool Club
Worcestershire and Dis Fed
Yorkshire Fed

1919

Barrow and Dis Fed
Bristol United S Rd Fed
Burton-on-Trent Dis Fed
Derbyshire Fed
Dudley Dis Fed
East Lancs Fed
East London Fed
Fifeshire Fed
Gloucester Combine
Hetton and Dis Fed
Lanarkshire Fed
Lancashire Central Fed
Leicestershire N Rd Fed
Liverpool and Dis Fed
Monmouthshire N Rd Fed
Newcastle Fed
North East Counties Fed
North Staffs Fed
North Yorks S Rd Fed
Northampton Town Fed
Northamptonshire Fed
Northumberland Fed
Ormskirk and Dis Fed
Ramsbottom Fed
Scottish Central Fed
Sheffield and Dis Fed
South Cheshire Fed
South Lancs Fed
Southport and Dis Fed

St Helens Boro' Fed
Stockport Fed
Tyne and Derwent Valley Fed
Tyneside Fed
Warwickshire Fed
West Cheshire and North Wales Fed
West Coast Fed
West Cumberland Fed
West Durham Fed
West Lancs Sat Fed
West Yorks Central Fed
West Yorks Fed
Widnes and Dis Fed
Wigan and Dis Amalgamation
Wigan and Dis Fed
Worcester and Dis Fed

1929

Ancoats Grove Fed
Annfield Plain Dis Fed
Ayrshire Fed
Ballochmyle Fed
Barnsley Fed
Berks, Bucks and Oxon Fed
Birkdale Fed
Birmingham Fed
Birmingham Saturday Fed
Border Fed
Burton, Derby Dis Fed

Bury and Dis Fed
 Cheadle Amalgamation
 Chester-le-Street Fed
 Coquetdale Fed
 County of Essex Fed
 Cresswell Fed
 Creswell Dis Fed
 Crystal Palace Dis Fed
 Deerness Valley Fed
 Derbyshire Fed
 Derwent Valley Fed
 Doncaster Dis Fed
 Doncaster Fed
 Dudley Dis Fed
 Dudley Fed
 Durham Central Fed
 Earlestown Fed
 East Anglian Fed
 East Cleveland Fed
 East Fife Fed
 East Kent S Rd Fed
 East Lancs Fed
 East London Fed
 East of Scotland Fed
 Eccles and Dis Fed
 Eccles Fed
 Essex N Rd Fed
 Ferryhill Fed
 Fifehire Fed
 Formby and Dis Fed
 Furness Dis Fed
 Gateshead Fed
 Glamorgan Fed
 Glasgow Fed
 Gloucestershire Fed
 Hants Fed
 Hemsworth Fed
 Hetton Fed
 Holme Valley Fed
 Houghton Dis Fed
 Isle of Thanet Fed
 Kyle Fed
 Lancashire Central Fed
 Leicestershire N Rd Fed
 Leicestershire S Rd Fed
 Liverpool Amalgamation
 Liverpool Dis Fed

London Fed
 London N Rd Fed
 Long Eaton Dis N Rd Fed
 Manchester Fed
 Mid-Cumberland Fed
 Mid-Derbyshire Fed
 Mid-Tyne Fed
 Monmouth Dis S Rd Fed
 Monmouthshire N Rd Fed
 NE Lancs Fed
 NE London Fed
 New North Road Combine (Wales)
 Newcastle Fed
 Normanton Dis Fed
 North Cheshire Dis Fed
 North Lancs Amalgamation
 North Lancs and Westmorland
 North Liverpool Fed
 North London Fed
 North Manchester Fed
 North Staffs Fed
 North Wirral Fed
 North Yorks Fed
 Northants Fed
 NE Counties Fed
 Nottingham Dis N Rd Fed
 Nottingham N Rd Fed
 Nottinghamshire Fed
 Notts Fed
 NW Lancs Fed
 NW Wales Fed
 NW Yorks Fed
 Ogmore Valley Combine HS
 Ormskirk Amalgamation
 Ormskirk Dis HS
 Ormskirk Fed
 Peterborough Fed
 Plymouth Combine
 Renfrewshire Fed
 S Yorkshire Fed
 Scottish Border Fed
 Scottish Central Fed
 SE Durham Fed
 SE Lancashire Saturday Fed
 Sheffield Fed
 Shropshire Homing Fed
 Solway Fed RPS

South Cheshire and Dis Fed
 South Coast Fed
 South Cumberland Dis Fed
 South Cumberland Fed
 South Derbyshire Fed
 South Lancs Fed
 South London Amalgamation
 Southern East London Fed
 Southport Amalgamation
 Southport Dis Amalgamation
 Southport Dis Fed
 South-Western Fed
 St Helens Dis Fed
 Stockport Fed
 Sunderland Dis Fed
 Surrey Fed
 SW Glamorgan Fed
 SW Lancs Combine
 Tayside Fed
 Thames Valley Fed
 Thames Valley N Rd Fed
 Three Counties Fed
 Tyne and Derwent Valley Fed
 Tynemouth North Fed
 Tyneside Fed
 Up North Combine
 Wakefield Fed
 Walsall Dis Fed
 Walsall Fed

Wansbeck Fed
 Warrington Fed
 Warwickshire Fed
 Welsh Hills S Rd Fed
 West Cheshire and North Wales Fed
 West Coast Fed
 West Cumberland Fed
 West Derbyshire Fed
 West Durham Fed
 West Essex Fed
 West Herts Dis N Rd Fed
 West Lancashire Fed
 West Leeds Amalgamation
 West London N Rd Fed
 West Lothian Fed
 West Manchester Fed
 West Middlesex Fed
 West Yorkshire Combine
 Widnes Dis Fed
 Widnes Fed
 Wigan Amalgamation
 Wigan Dis Fed
 Wiltshire Fed
 Wolverhampton Fed
 Worcester Fed
 Wrexham and Dis Fed
 York Durham Amalgamation
 Yorkshire Fed
 Yorkshire Middle Route Fed

1939

Birmingham Fed
 Blackburn Fed
 Bury Fed
 Cheadle Amal
 Derbyshire Fed
 Doncaster Fed
 East Anglian Fed
 East Fife Fed
 East Kent Fed
 East Lancs Fed
 East Manchester Fed
 East Nottingham Fed
 East of Scotland Fed

Fifeshire Fed
 Gateshead Fed
 Gloucester Fed
 Heavy Woollen Fed
 Lanarkshire Fed
 Liverpool Amalgamation
 Liverpool Fed
 London Fed
 Manchester Fed
 Mid-Tyne Fed
 NE Kent Amal
 NE London Fed
 North Lancs and Westmorland Fed

North Liverpool Fed
North London Fed
North Staffs Fed
North Wales Fed
North Wirral Fed
North Yorkshire Fed
Northants Fed
NW Lancashire Fed
NW London Fed
NW Yorkshire Fed
Ormskirk Fed
Peterborough Fed
Plymouth Combine
Scottish Central
SE Durham Fed
SE Lancashire Fed
SE London Fed
Shropshire Combine
South Cheshire Fed
South Coast Fed
South Derbyshire Fed
South Lancashire Fed
South of Mendips Fed

Southport Amal
Southport Fed
St Helens Jersey Combine
Stockport Fed
Sunderland Fed
Surrey Fed
Up North Combine
Warrington Fed
Warwickshire Fed
West Coast Fed
West Cumberland Fed
West Durham Fed
West Leeds Amal
West London Fed
West Manchester Fed
West Middlesex Fed
West Riding N Rd Combine
Wigan Amal
Wigan Fed
Wolverhampton Fed
Worcestershire Fed
Yorkshire Fed

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