

# GANDEY'S CIRCUS

IN CELEBRATION OF THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
PHILIP ASTLEY'S CIRCUS

The Gandey family celebrates Philip Astley, the creation of Circus as a worldwide renowned art form and our rich heritage.

The Gandeys can trace their history to the early 1800s, to the family of the renowned Frank Bostock of 'Bostock and Wombwell' fame, and still reside close to Leek, the family town in Staffordshire.

In the late 1800s the family were known to be performing their 'western games and pastimes' act as 'The Montanas' and the 'Colorado Troupe' with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show; in fairground side shows and on the Variety Theatre Circuit.

In future posts we will share our family photos, posters, cards and mementos as we revisit this history with you.



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Robert Gandey is pictured here with The North Western Troupe of  
Cowboys of Colorado, taken on 5th October 1922.



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Gandey's Comedy Circus circa 1910-1920 starring Arthur, Jack and  
The Colorado Kid (Robert Gandey) with the ever-popular ponies  
and mules act.



MR. ARTHUR. FRANK. W.D. BILLY. JACK. BOUN  
GANDEYS COMEDY CIRCUS.

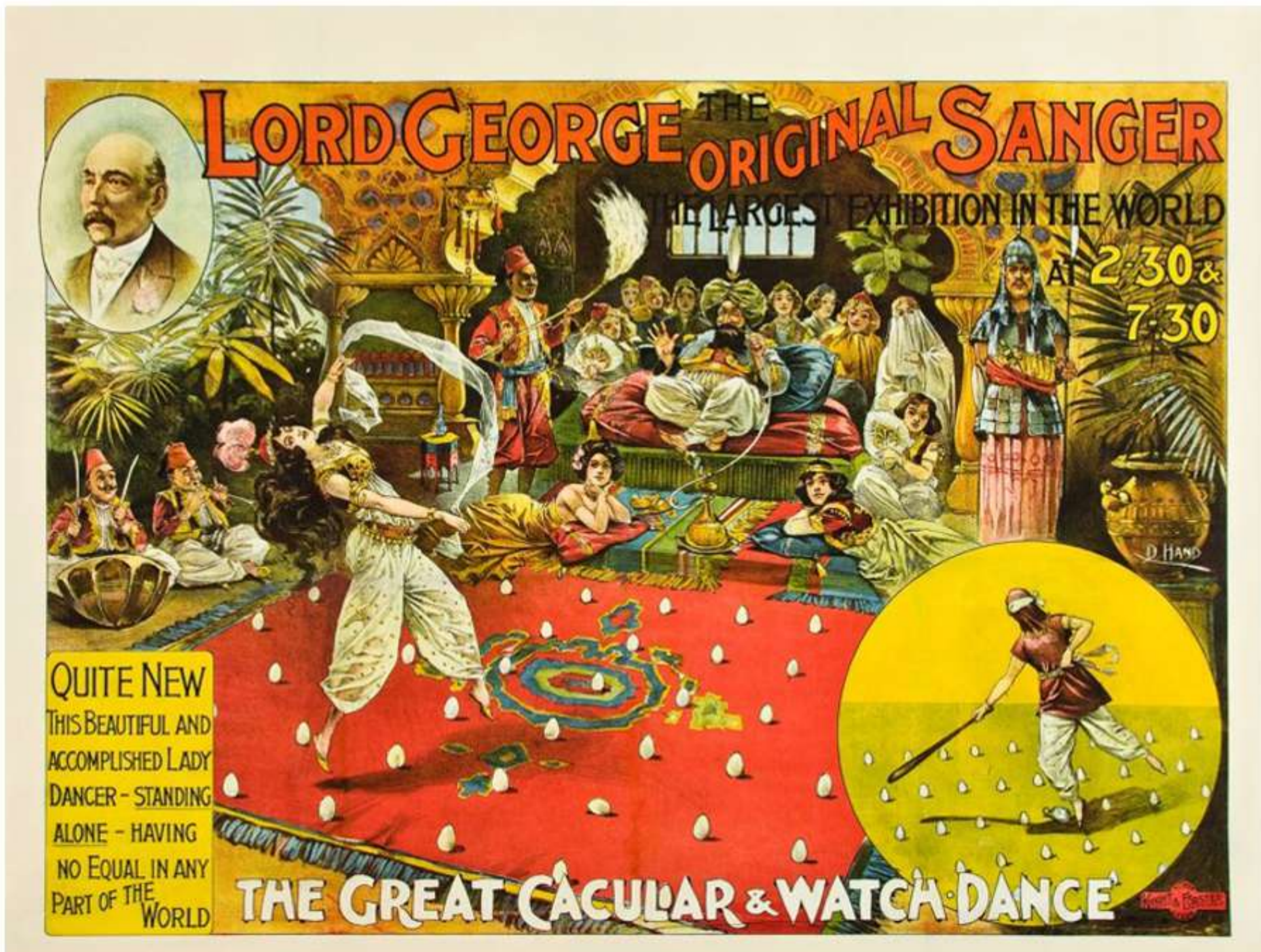
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## Bob Gandey - The Early Years

**1903**

Bob was 9 years old when he started his apprenticeship training ponies with Lord George Sanger's Circus, earning 1 shilling per week (that would be approximately £2.85 today).



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## Bob Gandey - The Early Years

**1909**

At 15 Bob worked on the American touring shows: Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Colonel Cummins' Golden West Show. He was a Western performer at the 1909 Earl's Court exhibition. Bob is pictured below on the far left, in Colonel Cummins' show.



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## Bob Gandey - The Early Years

**1911**

At 17 years of age, Bob met Rose Gandey. She came from Brighton and was performing at the Marina Lowestoft at the time.

**1912**

They married in Manchester, arriving at the registry office on horseback. Rose joined the Montana troupe, which began touring theatres with his horse 'Snowball', ponies and mules, and Western skills. His show regularly played the Moss Empire circuit.



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## Bob Gandey - The Early Years

### 1920s

The birth of Bob and Rose's son Phillip Gandey (known as Joe) brought the family to three. Their show began to appear at outdoor events and on the fairgrounds as a sideshow.

The name of the show became Gandey's Comedy Circus. It featured an unrideable mule and a turntable on which the acts performed; hand-rotated by Jack Gregory (pictured below with Joe), who became a lifelong friend of the family.



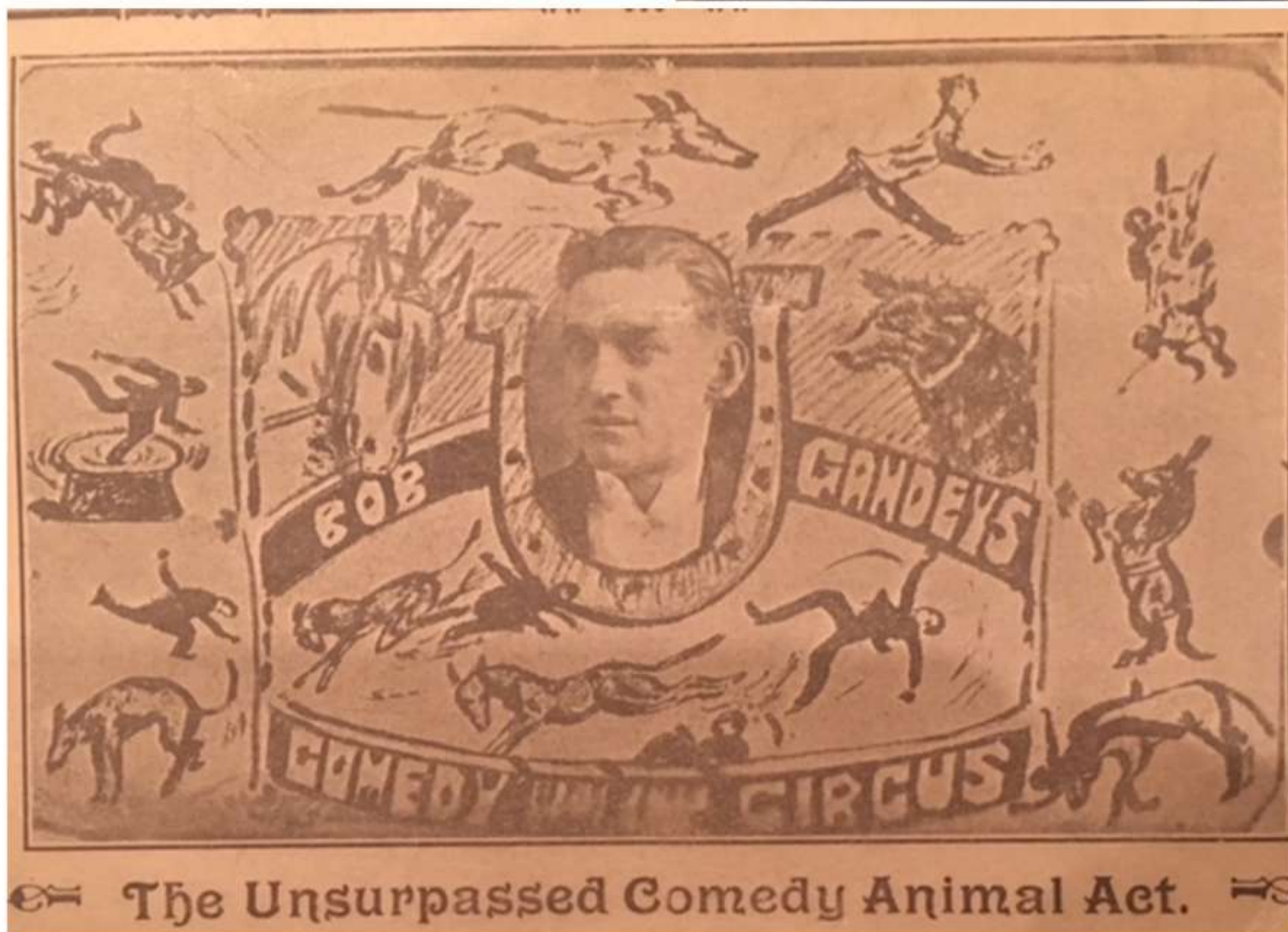
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## Bob Ganley - The Early Years

**1920s**

Gandey's Comedy Circus toured theatres with Western acts, ponies and mules, and a hand-revolved turntable that was used in the acts.





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Publicity in the local press has always been an important part of the entertainment industry. As you can see from this 1926 newspaper ad for Gandey's Comedy Circus – over 90 years ago!

**WINTER GARDENS**  
and Palais de Danse.  
WILLIAM HENRY BROADHEAD & SON

... (Friday and Tomorrow (Saturday) at 2 and 7.  
THE LAST PERFORMANCES OF THE SCREAM OF REVILS.  
"ENCORE"  
SUNDAY EVENING, SEPT. 5th, at 8 o'clock.  
THE WINTER GARDENS PAVILION.  
... The Super Film Play.  
"THE THOROUGHBREDED"  
... HULETTE and THEODORE VON ELTY. A  
... of love and romance. Also "WHERE THE CHEESE  
... (An Interest Picture) and "WHIRLIGIGS" (instructive)  
SEPT. 6th, 1926, and during the week. Twice Daily at 2 & 7.  
TOM DE GRAY PRESENTS  
"THE ACT SUPERBE"  
... Arabian horse and English sporting dogs in an artistic  
statuary novelty.  
GANDEY'S COMEDY CIRCUS.  
... riding competitions each night. Three prizes. Final night  
Friday.  
**TOM GOTT**  
Yorkshire's Dame Comedian.  
WELL CALVERT. THE SCHOLEYS.  
Latest Song Successes. Entertainers.  
LEAH VICTORIA.  
Comedy Cameos.  
**EDGAR BEYON**  
Presenting a Vaudeville Review.  
**DANCING IN THE PALAIS DE DANSE**  
1926 NEW OHIOS DANCE BAND, conducted by HARRY  
BIRCH, the Jazz Banjo King.

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Bob Gandey was a talented trainer of horses, ponies, mules, geese and sheep. His animal acts appeared at Blackpool Tower Circus, Tom Arnold's Circus at Haringay Arena, and most pantomimes and theatre circus productions. Bob is reported in a newspaper in the 1940s to have said he only trained animals using time, patience and kindness, and that fields in Cheshire had the largest stud of Shetland ponies this side of Aberdeen – as he would not part with them.

Below is a postcard that was sold at the show in the 1930s.



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The following excerpt is from the Express & Echo in Exeter  
(Tuesday 23 March 1937)

'Billed as the "Funniest Act in Vaudeville" Bob Gandey's Comedy Circus lives up to its reputation. The stage is held by ponies with seemingly human intelligence, whose tricks will be found to be completely mystifying. One of the things the audience will be most pleased to note in connection with this act is the fact that none of the feats the animals perform can be said to cause them discomfort. Gandey obviously had employed the "all done by kindness" policy with paying results.'

**Coliseum**  
EDINBURGH ROAD, PORTSMOUTH

Proprietor	Phone	Portsmouth Empire Palace Ltd
Chairman & Managing Director	73969	Mr. J. Jeffrey
Secretary		Mr. F. H. Lake
General Manager & Licensee		Mr. A. H. Kingwell
Stage Manager		Mr. A. H. King
Musical Director		Mr. Paul King

**6-10 | Twice Nightly | 8-15**  
**TUESDAY, DEC. 26th 1939**  
**REAL VARIETY**  
EXPENSIVE ENGAGEMENT OF  
**Bob Gandey's Famous**  
**COMEDY CIRCUS**  
Beautiful Ponies, Mules, Revolving Table,  
Knockabouts, Goat, Monkeys Etc. Etc.  
The Funniest Animal Act in Vaudeville

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During the war years the circus toured under canvas in a single mast tent using a tree trunk as a king pole. They entertained children in the villages. Often walking the ponies from venue to venue. Joe Gandey, the son of Bob and Rose, met Mary Kennerley, whose father was a local estate manager, and they married.

Gandey's Circus made its home along the A50 in Cheshire, but sadly a fire destroyed most of the early family history. The remnants of which we have shared with you these past weeks.



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In the 1940s Gandeys began providing shows for the 'Holidays at Home' initiative, in which local authorities would put on entertainment in public parks to allow people to have vacations at home and avoid the cost of going away. The below photograph was taken in Hyde Park, Manchester in 1942.



The personnel of Gandey's miniature circus. For the past twelve weeks they have been working "Holidays at Home" Weeks and they finish up at Hyde this week. After that they go into revue. The group was snapped at Oldham last week by an "Oldham Chronicle" photographer and we are indebted to them for permission to reproduce and the loan of the block.

W.F. 12 Sept. 1942.



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In the 1940s Gandeys Comedy Circus performed 'On the Gaff' - as a sideshow on the fairgrounds.



Pictured: Mary Gandey, Tickey the Clown and The Mighty Appolo



Pictured: Sonya Allen, Anita in the Air, Tommy Allen and Mr Chipperfield



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In the 1940s, Bob Gandey began putting on open air performances at Heysham Head, attracting crowds from all over the area, as seen in the below picture. Joe Gandey continued this tradition into the 1950s, after Bob sadly passed away.



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Pictured: The cast of Robert Gandey's Big Top Circus in the 1940s

Pictured: Michael Gerbola's strongman act. The Gerbola family still run a circus in Ireland



Pictured: Tickey the Clown and Mrs Gerbola in the Big Top



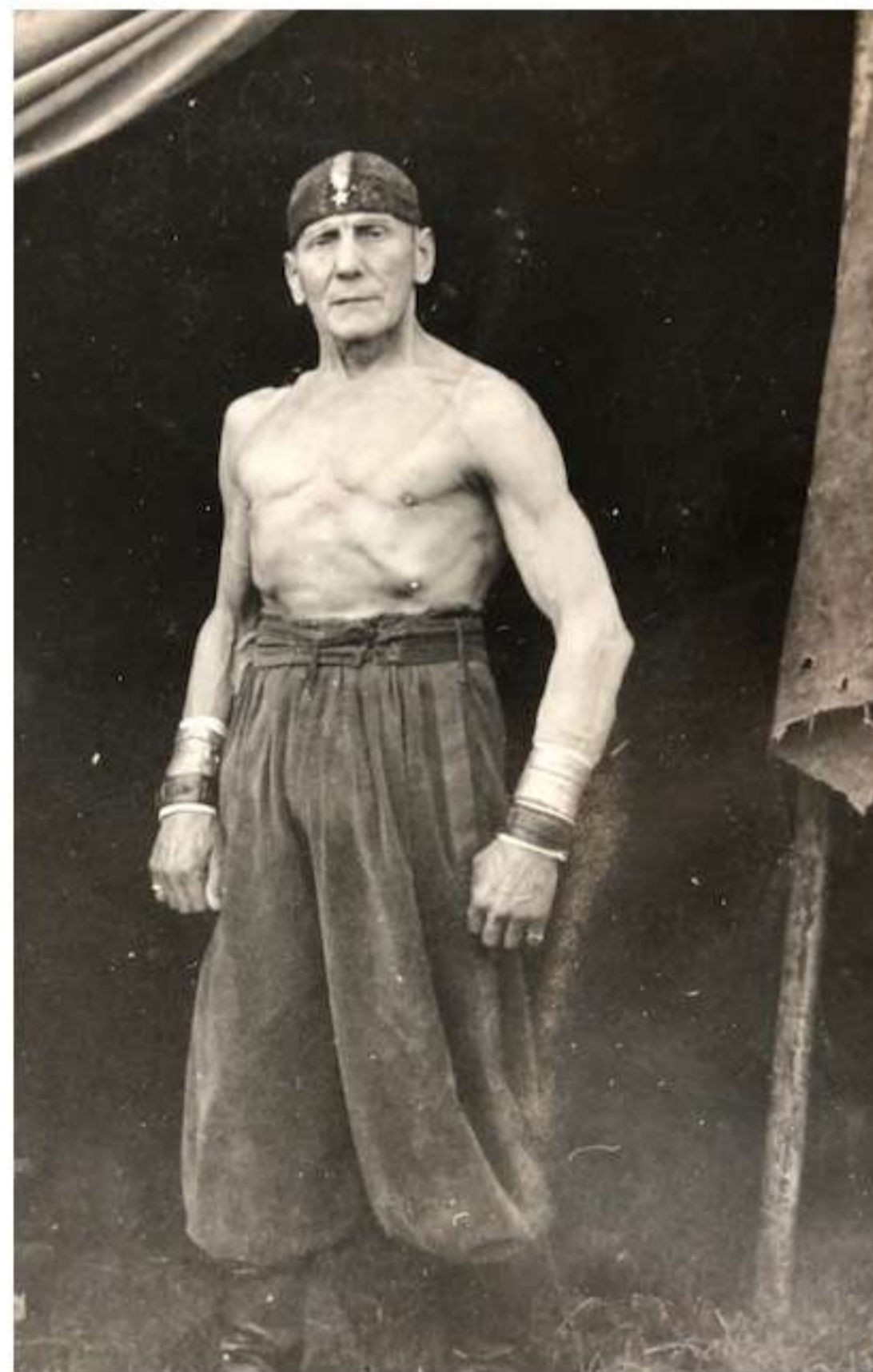


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Pictured: Bob Del Rio (Bob Lorne)  
and Mary Ganley. Bob presented  
an act called Western Pastimes



Pictured: Ivan Orloff,  
Strongman



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Pictured: Mary Gandey and Michael Gerbola performed as aerialists under the name 'The Kusicks'

Pictured: 'Gandey's Gaggle of Geese' - Arthur, Jane and Mary



Pictured: Joe Gandey's Circus at Heysham Head in the 1950s contained a wide variety of acts, including fire eaters, jugglers, performing ponies, a mind reader, and a doggy revue



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Touring accommodation in the 1940s may not have had the lavish amenities that modern circus artists are used to, but with somewhere to sleep and a cosy living area, there was still comfort to be found for performers on tour. Pictured below is Bob and Rose Gandey's 'home on the road'.



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## Newspaper excerpt about Bob Gandey

When I interviewed Bob, the circus's winter tour was about to begin, with performing sheep for "Bo-Peep". Another member of the circus staff, Bob Lorne, was off with four ponies for eight weeks of "Cinderella" at the Grand Theatre. Bob bred and trained all his ponies at Brereton, and reckoned he was "the biggest breeder of Shetlands this side of Aberdeen". The sheep he trained were all locally bred, running in the fields of Brereton before starting their winter tour. Bob would have them for a few days before the start of a tour, just to get them accustomed to him, and he claimed that when they got to the theatre and the music started, "there was no holding them". He claimed that you had to have a great love of animals to be able to train them, and his training motto was "Time, patience and kindness".

He really trained them only for himself, but occasionally would sell one to a private individual, on the condition that it was sold back to him when the owner wished to dispose of it. When I interviewed Mr and Mrs Gandey, they had forged another Brereton link, for son Joey had married a local girl, Mary Kennerley, who became a talented aerialist and is still very active. Their elder son, Michael, was already following in family footsteps - he wanted to be a ringmaster, like his grandfather. Bob's wife had retired from show business, although she had appeared in pantomime a couple of years earlier. In due course, the business became Joe Gandey's Circus, and younger son Phillip was now getting into the act as "Starri", the clown. In 1967, at 10, with his touring life, it was reckoned that he attended 500 different schools!



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In the 1940s, Joe and Mary Gandey welcomed their first child, Michael, into the world. Phillip was to follow in the 1950s (pictured below). Michael showed an early interest in becoming a ringmaster, but later chose a life away from the circus. Phillip, however, continued in the family tradition and still runs Gandeys Circus to this day - representing the third generation of the circus family.

