

## What a wonderful day it was when Buffalo Bill and



came roaring into Lincolnshire 63 years ago!

by JOHN A. RITCHIE

SEPTEMBER 12th, 1903, must have been a busy day for Bill Squires, the bill-poster for Holbeach and surrounding district. For that day he had the job of sticking up posters advertising a coming event which was a talking point throughout England. The posters read :

"Exhibiting At Spalding — One Day Only — **BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD**" . . . "500 horses, 800 people" . . . "twice daily, rain or shine."

People must have taken special notice of that last phrase — "rain or shine" — for the last time that a really big American show (Barnum and Bailey's Circus) had visited Spalding in October, 1899, there was a terrific gale and hundreds of disappointed folk had to be told that the big top was unsafe for the performance.

This time people hoped they would be lucky. And this time the exhibition (as it was called) was far bigger. In fact it would be the same splendid programme as the one that had been taking place in London at Olympia during the winter season. Now it was touring England via important railway centres and on September 23rd the exhibition would be at Spalding.

Major "Arizona" John Burke, press agent for William Frederick (Buffalo Bill) Cody, visited Spalding about a week before the great day to give the show some publicity — not that it needed any, for "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" was known throughout Europe.

This was Bill's second visit to England, the first having been in the Spring of 1887. He was the social rage of London, having entertained, during his first visit, Her

Majesty Queen Victoria (then celebrating her Golden Jubilee), and during his second visit, such guests as Edward VII and Queen Alexandra (twice).

Large advertisements for the exhibition appeared in the September 8th and 15th editions of the *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press* (now the *Lincolnshire Free Press*) giving details of the acts, and the seating arrangements. Reserved box seats could be booked at the Free Press Office in Hall Place.

### OVER 150 RAIL CARS

The day before the Spalding show, the Wild West was at Leicester. Three special trains, each consisting of approximately fifty-two cars, left that place at around midnight and travelled to Spalding via Saxby and Bourne. When the trains arrived at Spalding they proceeded over the embankment as far as Cunningham's Drove, where the engines were attached to the other ends of the carriages and then brought into Spalding station, in a position for leaving for Boston, where the exhibition was due to appear on the 24th September.

Despite the early hour, quite a number of townfolk assembled in the vicinity of Stepping Stone Lane to see the unloading — and in what an efficient way it was carried out! In no time at all the horses, numbering over five hundred, were unloaded, led to the field belonging to Mr. Green Waltham (known as Mr. Green Waltham's Park) on the Pinchbeck Road, stabled, fed and watered. There was some difficulty in getting the show vans into the field because of the soft nature of the ground — but when some sixteen horses were harnessed to each van, the problem was soon overcome.



In three hours the tents were all erected . . . tents for stables, dressing rooms, smithy, repair department and electric light department — the latter having two special plants to illuminate the arena at night.

During the morning quite a number of people visited the sideshows — to see such marvels as Japanese magic, the snake enchantress, the boy giant, a sword swallower, and, as *Mr. C. Friend*, of Bourne, remembers, "a dog-faced man — just like an old English sheep-dog!"

The townsfolk must have been even more amazed at seeing real Indians, Arabs and Cossacks strolling around the grounds. Some of the Indians had their wives and children with them, and in actual fact one or two Indian babies were born whilst the show was at Spalding!

*Mr. E. Tingle*, of Holbeach, remembers the show very well. He left work early to journey to Spalding by train. *Mr. Tingle*, who greatly admired horses, said he wouldn't have missed the show for the world.

*Mr. J. Smith*, of Spalding, loaned me a copy of the *Rough Rider* — a programme-cum-illustrated magazine published by *Bill Cody* and *Nate Salisbury*, his partner. This programme, with a drawing of Buffalo Bill on the cover, contained illustrations of the tents and arena, and of the artists appearing in the exhibition.

#### TOO BIG FOR A BIG TOP!

The arena was not covered in by a big top — it was far too spacious for that — but a high canvas surround covered the seating and one end of the arena which contained a beautifully painted backcloth, by the great artist *Fred Dangerfield*, depicting a typical Wild West scene.

The arena must have been on a grand scale, for, as *Mr. Tingle* recalls, there were more than two hundred horses in the arena at one time. As the *Rough Rider* points out,

"The facilities that this enterprise gives for such a realistic exhibition far exceed those of any other extent, as in its stupendous open air area it has been enabled to first introduce, upon a scale of commensurate magnitude and genuine composition, war-like revues, spectacles and tableaux, and even tremendously grand and effective scenes of important battles."

The September 30th edition of the *Free Press* contained a revue of the exhibition under the heading "The 'Wild West' at Spalding — A Great Show." It described *Cody*, who was 57 years old at that time, as

"A fine, picturesque figure . . . straight as a lance, riding his splendid horse like a Centaur; his long white locks, grey moustache and imperial, and his bizarre scout's costume being essentially faithful reproduction of the 'Buffalo Bill' of the gorgeous posters, which during the past fortnight have given a decidedly Wild West appearance to the Spalding district."

There were two performances — one at two p.m., and one at eight p.m. Both were packed out, some fourteen to fifteen thousand people visiting the exhibition. It opened with Buffalo Bill's mounted cowboy band which, as was to be expected, played *The Star Spangled Banner*, with "a clash and spirit quite characteristic of the West." Then all the "Rough Riders of the World" rode into the ring — the U.S. Cavalrymen, the Cossacks, Roosevelt's Rough Riders, the Cowboys, Mexican Ruralies, Arabs, and, last but by no means least, the American Red Indians.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

ER 8, 1903.

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SPALDING ONE DAY ONLY, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23.

GROUNDS:

GREEN WALTHAM'S PARK, PINCHBECK ROAD.

## BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST

AND Congress of Rough Riders of the World

Headed and Personally Introduced by

### COL. W. F. CODY

(BUFFALO BILL)

NOW TOURING THE PROVINCES.

Visiting the Principal Cities and Greater Railway Centres Only

4 Special Trains, 500 Horses, 800 People,  
THE ENTIRE GRAND PROGRAMME

Will invariably be presented undivided and uncurtailed

TWICE DAILY, RAIN or SHINE

A Pre-eminent Exhibition of Universal Interest.

The One Grand Ruler of the Amusement Realm

A veritable Kindergarten of

History-teaching facts; not

on fiction founded.

LIVING OBJECT LESSONS

Taken from the pages of realism and illustrated by the very men who have assisted in making familiar the most famed of the World's Mounted Warriors. A gathering of extraordinary consequence to fittingly illustrate all that has and can be endured by Virile Martial Manhood. Cowboys, "Dime Patriots," Mexican Ruralies, Bedouin Arabs, South American Gauchos, United States Cavalry, Russian Cossacks, American Artillery, Western Girls, Roosevelt's Rough Riders, Royal English Lancers, and all the features that made the Wild West famous.

100 AMERICAN INDIANS  
Genuine "Blanket" Red Men, Chiefs, Warriors, Squaws, and Papooses from the Umpqua, Brule, Ogallala, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Yankton, and Sioux Tribes. New and interesting arrangement of the well-known

WILD WEST INCIDENTS  
Retracing the Pioneers of the Plains, who tell the story of the progress in the Great Drama of Civilization by

Pictures of Border Life.  
The Stage Coach "Hold-up," Cowboys' "Round-up," Riding Wild Bucking Bronchos, Indian War Dances, Attack on the Emigrant Train, Equestrian Feats and Skill, Warlike Pageants and Military Exercises.

Interesting Scenic Episode of the Spanish-American War.  
Being a Realistic Military Spectacle of the

BATTLE OF SAN JUAN HILL.  
The Vast Arena Illuminated at Night by Two Special Electric Light Plants.

Two Performances Every Week Day. Afternoons at 2. Evenings at 8.  
Doors Open at 1 and 7 p.m. One Ticket Admits to all Advertised Attractions.  
PRICES OF ADMISSION — 1s., 2s., 3s., 4s. Box Seats, 5s. and 7s. 6d. Children under 10 years half-price to all except the 1s. seats. All seats are numbered, except those at 1s. and 2s. No Tickets under 4s. sold in advance. Tickets at all prices, on sale on the Grounds at hours of opening, and Tickets at 4s., 5s., and 7s. 6d. on sale at 8 a.m. on the day of Exhibition at

"FREE PRESS" OFFICE, HALL PLACE.

A FREE ENTERTAINMENT FOR EVERYBODY.

Visiting the Exhibition Grounds at 11 a.m. Preliminary Open Air Concert by the Famous Cowboy Military Band, and other interesting Features.

WILL ARRIVE at BOSTON, SEPTEMBER 21.

A CUSTOMER BRIDGE WEDDING

This advertisement is reproduced from the "Lincolnshire Free Press." It originally appeared in the September 8th and 15th editions in 1903.



## NOT A CIRCUS

Mr. Tingle remembers how magnificently the horses pranced and interweaved in the arena, at one moment seemingly a hopeless entanglement, and at the next a completely orderly line. Buffalo Bill rode out last of all and, in a stirring voice, introduced his Rough Riders to the audience. He stressed that the show was not a circus, but an exhibition; that the participants were only doing in the arena what they at one time did daily in the ordinary routine of life.

Then the show was under way. According to the *Free Press* one of the most effective episodes was the Indian attack on the emigrant train. This was eventually repulsed in a most dashing fashion by Buffalo Bill and his cowboy band.

W. Gray, of Spalding, remembers Buffalo Bill riding around the arena at full gallop shooting down blue glass balls which were thrown up in the air by *Johnny Baker*, who rode along at his side. Then it was the turn of Baker himself to show his marksmanship. Several people remember his remarkable sharp-shooting; Mr. Friend recalls "... a man called Baker who could shoot to hit without fail with a magazine rifle."

Another attraction was an exhibition of life-saving by a crew from the U.S. Life-Saving Corps, by means of the rocket apparatus and breeches buoy. As a complete contrast there were demonstrations of breaking bronchos, roping steers, and skilful lassoing by the Mexicans. The Mexican Rurales, with their sugar-loaf hats, silver trimmed, spurs, high pommel saddles and velvet embroidered and bespangled jackets, possessed a matchless skill in throwing the lasso, which was to them a necessary accomplishment practised from childhood.

There followed a pony-express demonstration which showed how letters and telegrams were distributed across the immense continent of America prior to the days of the railways and the telegraph. And then there was an attack on the Deadwood stagecoach — the one made famous by the fact that four kings (the Kings of Greece, Saxony, Denmark and of the Belgians) had ridden in it together. Once again the fifty-odd Sioux Indians were dispersed heroically by Buffalo Bill and his cowboy band.

## THE ROUGH RIDERS

Probably the grandest event was the realistic representation of the assault and capture of San Juan Hill by Roosevelt's Rough Riders — an incident which was still fresh in the minds of many, as the Spanish-American War had ended only a few years before. Buffalo Bill, of course, played the part of Teddy Roosevelt. The first scene of this episode represented the bivouac which was "a very happy piece of construction with a beautifully painted backcloth representing purple hills in the distance, and the gentle slopes that lead to the slight eminence of San Juan." The second scene represented the storming of the hill.

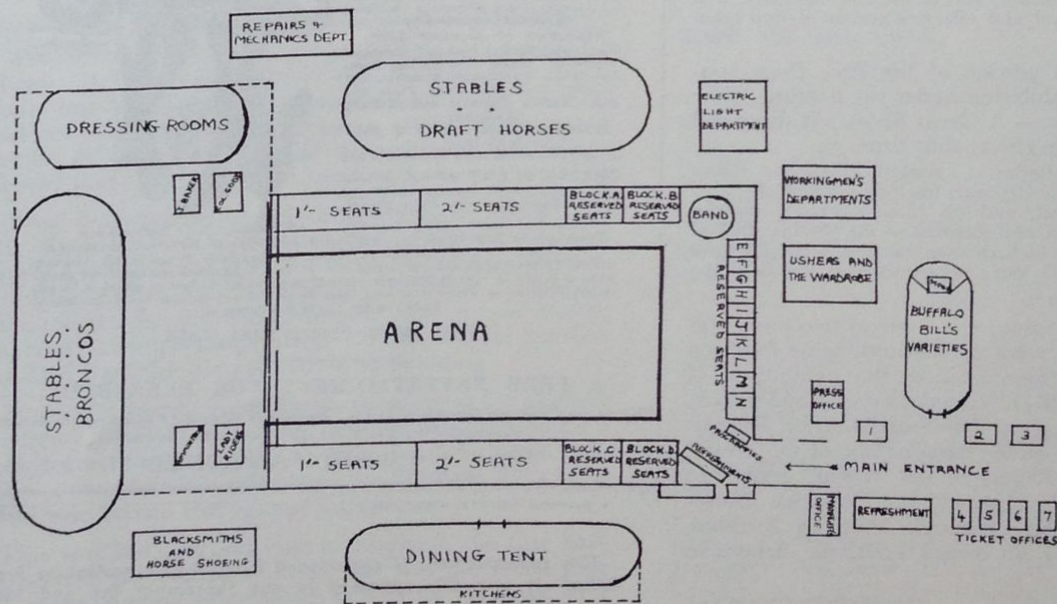
After the evening performance, there was an excellent variety show in one of the tents. Those people who did not stay for this and therefore left at around 9.30 p.m. remarked that some of the show vans were already laden ready for leaving. The three special trains left for Boston in the early hours of the morning.

There the exhibition enjoyed the same success as it did at Spalding, having an attendance of some 17,000 people. From Boston they proceeded to Grantham where two performances were held on Friday, 25th September; then on to Lincoln for two performances on the 26th. The company then left the county for Leeds, where the show was to exhibit for a week.

All over England Cody's show was a great success. Small boys who had eagerly followed the lurid adventures of Buffalo Bill in the Dime Novels had a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see their hero in real life — and only just in time, for Bill returned to his home in Wyoming in October, never to return.

No similar show has ever quite captured the imagination like "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" did. As the *Rough Rider* pointed out at the time:

"... an exhibition constituted as is the Wild West, labours under one serious disadvantage, that its continuance is limited by the practicability of obtaining men who were actually plainsmen, pioneers, scouts and Indian fighters. When the supply of that material is exhausted, which naturally cannot be put off to a very distant future, the Wild West will have to stop."



## Plan of the Show

A plan of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, as it would appear in Mr. Green Waltham's Park (now a field belonging to Mr. S. Freer) on the Pinchbeck Road, Spalding, in 1903.