

HENRY DALE 1869-1909

By Dale Hartle

Henry Dale was born on 24 January 1869 in Lawrence, Otago. He was the second youngest son of Charles Hawkins Dale and Eliza Mary Bolton Stow.

At the time he was born Henry had 3 older brothers and 3 older sisters. Another brother and 3 more sisters came after him.

Henry's nickname was "Harry" which is used in some of the newspaper articles about him.

Wirth's Brothers Circus – a crowd favourite

In 1904 when Henry was 35 years, he joined Wirth's Circus when it toured New Zealand from February to April 1904 and was put in charge of looking after the menagerie (animals) along with other circus duties.

Wirth's Circus was formed in 1880 and by the end of the decade it was Australia's premier circus. It first toured New Zealand in December 1889 and toured regularly for the next 60 years, becoming a public favourite.

The circus had four combined menageries and a large number of expensive rare animals. They also had circus artists, comedians and acrobatic acts from all over the world, and the circus was known as the Rolls-Royce of circuses of international standard and reputation.

On Wirth's tour of New Zealand in 1909, the menagerie in transit from Hastings received an unusual request, to rescue a steam traction engine stuck in shingle in the Waipawa River.

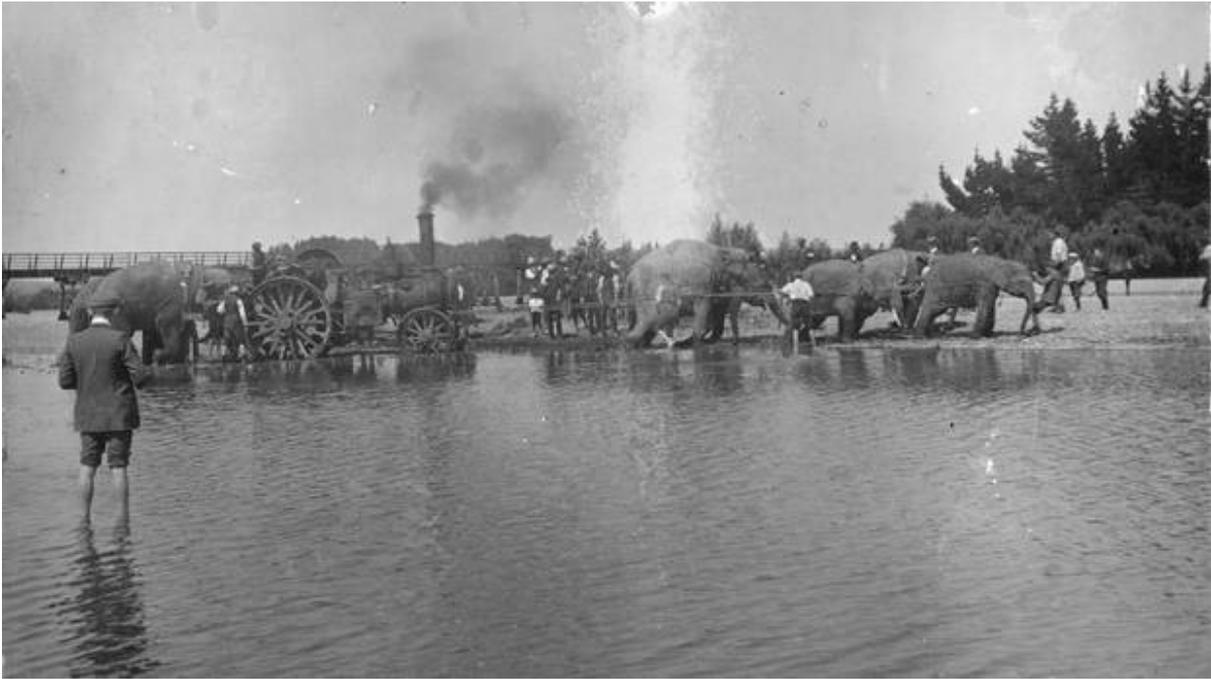
When the circus arrived in Waipawa, the steam driver approached George Wirth and asked if he could "use his herd of elephants to tow the steam engine from the river?"

Five elephants were placed at the front of the engine and two, Alice and Toby, took to the rear.

The elephants shifted the engine with considerable trumpeting.

Thrilled by this, the steam driver gave a couple of triumphant whistles, only for the elephants to be spooked by the resultant noise. They ran off and had to be "captured" again.

The two elephants at the rear of the engine, Alice and Toby, were females.



https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503462&objectid=11798172

Back in Australia in mid-1909, the circus was touring Queensland when a tragic accident occurred.



Image from Google showing an elephant working in the rail yards with his master.

The local newspapers extensively reported the tragic incident:

KILLED BY AN ENRAGED ELEPHANT.

A CIRCUS ATTENDANT CRUSHED TO DEATH.

Brisbane, June 28. 1909

At Childers a menagerie attendant, Henry Dale, attached to Wirth Brothers Circus, met his death in an appalling manner yesterday. The unfortunate man was in charge of an elephant which was transporting material to a special train at the railway station, and on its arrival there with the load the elephant, which had previously shown signs of bad temper, suddenly pinned Dale against a railway truck with its head. The injured man, whose chest was crushed flat, died shortly afterwards. He was a single man, a native of New Zealand. The same animal is alleged to have previously killed two men.

Fatality, at Childers.

MAN KILLED BY: AN ELEPHANT. CHILDERS. June 27. 1909

A menagerie attendant- named Henry Dale, attached to Wirth Brothers' circus, which played here last evening met his death by one of the elephants in an appalling manner today. The man had charge of the large animals which were transporting material to the special train - at the railway station. On arrival with the loads, the elephant, which had previously showed signs of bad temper, suddenly pinned Dale against the railway truck with its head, and when the injured man fell to the ground it completed its revenge. Dale rose to his feet and managed to stagger a few yards away exclaiming, "Leave me alone. I'll be all right soon." Dr. Perkins' was summoned and arrived on the scene in a few minutes, but the poor fellow was past help, expiring just after. His chest had been crushed flat. He had been with the circus for five years, but was not the regular keeper of the elephant. Dale was very popular with the circus company, who are very despondent at his tragic fate. The same animal is alleged to have previously killed two men. Dale was from New Zealand, and has no relatives in Australia. He was a single man.

Bundaberg Mail and Burnett Advertiser, Monday 28 June 1909, page 2

A CHILDERS SENSATION

CIRCUS MAN KILLED BY ELEPHANT

CHILDERS, Sunday

A fatal accident occurred in this railway yard this morning. A man named Harry Dale, aged 40 years, employed with Wirth Brothers' circus, was shunting trucks, with the elephant Toby, when the animal suddenly turned on him and butted him twice or three times in the chest and body against a railway truck. The man fell to the ground, when the elephant again butted him, and then made off. Dale struggled to his feet and ran a few yards and then collapsed. He expired about 15 minutes after the accident. His ribs and chest were terribly crushed. He came from Invercargill, New Zealand, and was a very popular man. He was unmarried.

The elephant has been in a dubious and ill-tempered mood previously and has hurt several other people. His regular keeper, Burrows, is at present away in the south and Dale was temporarily in

charge. When Dale fell the first time his mates ran up to him, and on his rising he replied in answer to their inquiries that he was all right, and then collapsed. Dr Perkins was summoned, but life was extinct before he arrived. The accident created quite a sensation.

The accident was widely reported in New Zealand newspapers, with similar stories. It must have been quite shocking to the family and locals who knew Henry.

CRUSHED TO DEATH. BY AN ENRAGED ELEPHANT. TRAGEDY IN A CIRCUS.

EVENING POST, VOLUME LXXVII, ISSUE 151, 28 JUNE 1909

BRISBANE, This Day.

A man named Harry Dale, employed at Wirths' Circus, was attacked by an enraged elephant, and crushed to death.

Deceased was a New Zealander, and came from Invercargill.

TRAGIC DEATH.

EVENING POST, VOLUME LXXVIII, ISSUE 7, 8 JULY 1909

Palmerston North, This Day.

Particulars have been received of the circumstances surrounding the tragic death in Queensland of Harry Dale, youngest son of Mrs E. Dale, of Palmerston, which was briefly reported by cable last week. Dale was an elephant-keeper attached to Wirths' Circus, which was showing at Childers, Queensland. He was in charge of an elephant which was transporting the material to a special train at the railway station. On arrival with the load, the elephant, which had previously shown signs of bad temper, suddenly pinned Dale against a railway truck with its head, crushing him so terribly that he died shortly afterwards. The same animal is said to have previously killed two men. Deceased was a single man, and had intended to return to Palmerston shortly.

In a further report in the *Hawera & Normanby Star* dated 12 July 1909, there's a story about this particular elephant:

During the visit of Wirth's Circus to Hawera some little time back Mr Carpenter, the well-known fruiterer, was buffeted by an elephant. In the afternoon a matinee performance was being given, and Mr Carpenter went to see it. He took with him eight apples, one for each of the elephants. Having given the eighth animal an apple, Mr Carpenter stood back from the time. A few minutes later this elephant, which had tusks, rushed at Mr Carpenter, catching him in the abdomen and throwing him among the spectators some few feet away. Mr Carpenter remonstrated with one of the employees, who said something to the effect that he (Mr Carpenter) should not go near the elephant, and that he had better look out, as the animal had already killed two men. Mr Carpenter received a severe shaking, and it was some days before he was able to be about again. Mr Carpenter, in conversation with a STAR reporter, said the elephant referred to in the foregoing wire was probably the animal which attacked him.

Toby The First – a troublemaker



Toby was obtained by Moore Park from W.H Hartley in 1887. Hartley had used her as a performing elephant.

Toby proved to be of difficult temperament and was sold to Wirth's Circus around 1904. She had several escapes during the time they owned her. In 1915 Toby became ill and died.

Read the story of Toby on the [Circuszooanimals blog](#).

DEATH OF A CIRCUS ELEPHANT.

A familiar figure of Wirth Bros Ltd's circus ring has disappeared, Toby, the oldest and cleverest elephant of the herd, which died yesterday morning after a two or three days illness. For years she was the principal performer in the elephant's act, and did tricks denoting intelligence almost human. She was about eighty years of

age, and was worth nearly £2000 She had a remarkable memory. On one occasion during a steamer voyage an engineer "loaded" an orange with pepper and gave it to her. On a subsequent voyage the same engineer passed near her, and she grabbed him with her trunk, and only the rigging saved the man from going overboard. She died of a similar complaint to the one which caused her collapse on the bridge at Nowra a year ago. On that occasion she held up the horse traffic for about twelve hours.

- Sydney Morning Herald 30 April 1915

Later on, the Otago Witness reported:

STAGE GOSSIP - OTAGO WITNESS, ISSUE 2889, 28 JULY 1909

Wirth Brothers have had a run of bad luck lately. The last fatality to a circus hand through the fierceness of an elephant is a sad addition to a lengthy list. Several accidents to their servants have happened quite recently, and the mishap to their tent a little while back was, to say the least, unpleasant. Then there was the death of the giraffe. And the worst of the luck is the Wirths are ideal masters, super careful of their public, and spare no expense for safety and un-to-dateness. If care and thought go for aught, the Wirths should be exempt from any unpleasantness.

Burial



Following Henry’s tragic death, his fellow workers paid for his burial and erected a white marble headstone.

The inscription reads (note month is incorrect, it should read June):

“In memory of HARRY DALE, killed 27 July 1909, At Rest with God. Erected by members of Wirths Circus.”

Harry was buried Apple Tree Creek Cemetery, Block 5, row 2, near Bundaberg in Queensland.

No photo of Henry can be found.

Corrections and updates:

If any member of the family finds an error or omission in this document, or is able to provide photographs, please contact Dale Hartle on email [mjhartle at xtra.co.nz](mailto:mjhartle@xtra.co.nz) in Levin, New Zealand.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, there is bound to be mistakes and updates would be gratefully received.

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