

What are zoos for?

Do we need zoos today?

[Presented by Helen Skelton]

[Clip from BBC ONE drama Our Zoo]

Now I'm thinking, stables here. The greenhouse, out the back, now that is huge, and there are ten acres of land all ready to be used as a paddock. It's perfect for animals.

[Helen Skelton at Chester Zoo]

As a child, I remember going to zoos and being fascinated by the number of different animals from all over the world in one place.

Today, Chester is one of the biggest zoos in the UK with over 11,000 animals and 400 species. But believe it or not this all started as one man's passion in his back garden.

A century ago, most zoos in Britain kept the animals in small barred cages with concrete floors. After visiting one as a boy, Chester's founder George Mottershead decided to create a new type of zoo.

[Clip from BBC ONE drama Our Zoo]

George, what's going on?

I want to build a zoo. But with no bars, no small cages, no walls.

[Helen Skelton at Chester Zoo]

In the 1930s, George bought this Victorian mansion, Oakfield Manor, and started to fill the grounds with exotic animals from circuses and private collections.

As funding allowed he built bigger enclosures. In 1956, George built Chimp Island and it's still home to the chimps today, but it's much improved. I can see why George loved them. They are absolutely fascinating.

George was always striving to make animal welfare central, but he still needed to pull in crowds to fund his work.

80 years ago, George Mottershead was asking whether zoos should be a place for public entertainment or scientific research and those are questions that are still being debated today.