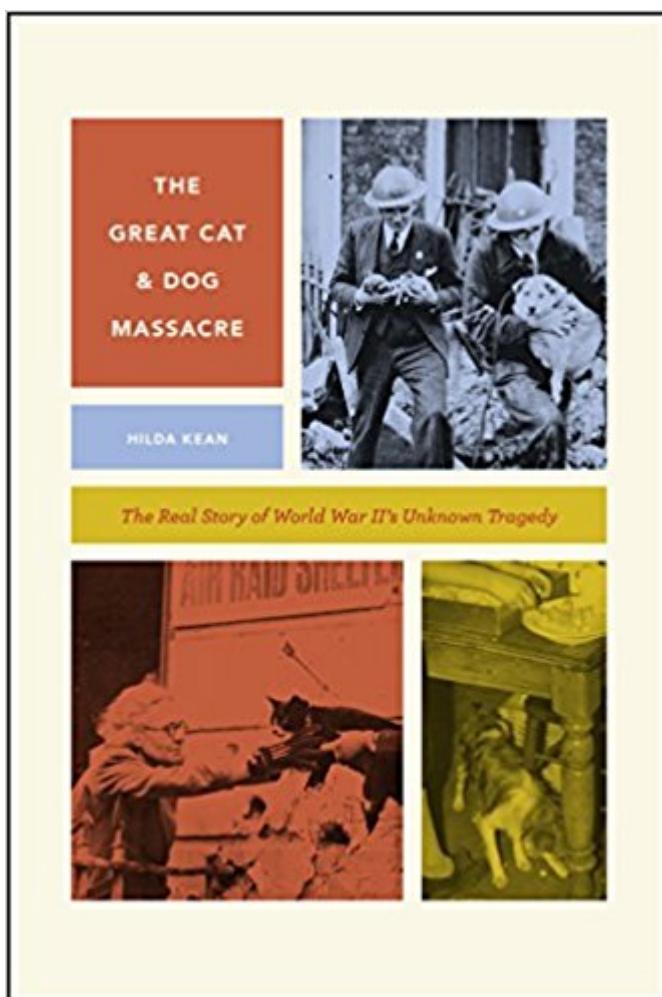


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The Great Cat And Dog Massacre: The Real Story Of World War Two's Unknown Tragedy (Animal Lives)



Synopsis

The tragedies of World War II are well known. But at least one has been forgotten: in September 1939, four hundred thousand cats and dogs were massacred in Britain. The government, vets, and animal charities all advised against this killing. So why would thousands of British citizens line up to voluntarily euthanize household pets? In *The Great Cat and Dog Massacre*, Hilda Kean unearths the history, piecing together the compelling story of the life-and-death of Britain's wartime animal companions. She explains that fear of imminent Nazi bombing and the desire to do something to prepare for war led Britons to sew blackout curtains, dig up flower beds for vegetable patches, send their children away to the countryside—and kill the family pet, in theory sparing them the suffering of a bombing raid. Kean's narrative is gripping, unfolding through stories of shared experiences of bombing, food restrictions, sheltering, and mutual support. Soon pets became key to the war effort, providing emotional assistance and helping people to survive—a contribution for which the animals gained government recognition. Drawing extensively on new research from animal charities, state archives, diaries, and family stories, Kean does more than tell a virtually forgotten story. She complicates our understanding of World War II as a "good war" fought by a nation of "good" people. Accessibly written and generously illustrated, Kean's account of this forgotten aspect of British history moves animals to center stage—forcing us to rethink our assumptions about ourselves and the animals with whom we share our homes.

Book Information

Series: Animal Lives

Hardcover: 248 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; 1st edition edition (March 14, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022631832X

ISBN-13: 978-0226318325

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.5 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #584,674 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #253 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Pets & Animal Care > Food & Nutrition #257 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Animal Rights #742 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Pets & Animal

Customer Reviews

“Kean’s snapshots of life during wartime are engaging. . . . Her book suggests that history should acknowledge everybody to include bodies with four legs as well as two.” (New York Times Book Review) “The tremendous loss of human life during World War II has made this episode an unsuitable one to criticize. Kean’s book brings to light an uncomfortable chapter in British history.” (Wall Street Journal) “By unearthing this odd but significant moment of compassionate hysteria, Kean’s book undercuts this portrayal of the resolute Empire, suggesting the terror and irrationality beneath the stiff upper lip.” (Los Angeles Review of Books) “A multifaceted history. . . . Pursuing questions as varied as a pet’s value in the years leading up to the war, how the idea of war-preparedness (or “doing things”) goaded people into acting drastically (and often pointlessly), and how the event shaped thinking on animal rights, Kean achieves an unusual psychological portrait of a society in wartime.” (New Yorker) Kean’s book, which has some excellent illustrations, insightful anecdotes, and shrewd analysis, lists the ways in which domestic animals both suffered in the war and also contributed to the war effort. “I was completely riveted, not least by what *The Great Cat And Dog Massacre* tells you about our unexpectedly ambivalent attitudes towards animals.” (Daily Mail) “This is a brilliant telling of an important but neglected story of Britain’s “People’s War.” Kean’s reconstruction of the unnecessary slaughter of hundreds of thousands of pet animals at the outbreak of war will live long in the reader’s memory. But it is matched by her meticulous recovery of the changing aspect of animal-human relations throughout the remaining six years of conflict.” (Jerry White, author of *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People*) “This is a profoundly important book. Like a piece of paper folded into origami, it reveals new dimensions to a tragic subject. It reshapes our historical understanding by giving us a remarkable model of cross-species inclusivity. I want to start reading it all over again to see just how Kean pulled this off.” (Carol J. Adams, author *The Sexual Politics of Meat*) “Beginning with the mass slaughter of household pets immediately after Britain’s declaration of war on Germany in 1939, Kean’s compelling account explores the varied ways in which domesticated animals experienced the Home Front. With the exception of what contemporaries criticized as “the holocaust of pets,” most of these experiences were shared by human and

non-human animals. By retrieving evidence of the lives of individual companion animals, as well as by documenting the increasing official acknowledgment of their value and standing, Kean offers a fresh perspective on what has often been called the "People's War." (Harriet Ritvo, author most recently of *Noble Cows and Hybrid Zebras: Essays on Animals and History*) "For those who think everything has been said about Britain's war, here is a book that will change our perspective on the popular image of the British people calmly coping with the challenges of the home front. Kean not only brings animals into the wartime narrative in their own right, but challenges the way historians have treated the wartime experience. This is a remarkably rich and detailed history, not only reconstructing the unknown story of the animal massacre, but in the process offering a profound view of the way animals and humans interact." (Richard Overy, author of *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945*) "The shocking story of why up to 750,000 animals were killed in the first week of the Second World War is the subject of a fascinating new book." (Daily Express)

Hilda Kean is visiting professor at the University of Greenwich and an honorary senior research associate at University College London. Her many books include *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* and *London Stories: Personal Lives, Public Histories*.

Illuminating. The plight of the animals is, of course, heartbreakingly all the more so for the pointlessness of it all. Yet the owners are very ordinary people acting out of fear and a desire to "do something." Anticipating the war created a feeling of helplessness and dread, which often inspired irrational acts. A sense of purpose and proportion didn't return until the bombs began falling.

A distasteful book about a historical episode that should have been allowed to be forgotten, badly written and shoddily researched. Avoid!

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