

# The story of the RSPCA (A)

## How it all began

On 16 June 1824, a London vicar, Arthur Broome, met 22 founding members, including the MPs William Wilberforce and Richard Martin, at Old Slaughters Coffee House. They launched a society to prevent cruelty to animals. The SPCA became the first national animal protection society in the world. Since that meeting in London in 1824, the RSPCA has worked tirelessly to promote kindness and prevent cruelty to animals. Wilberforce was also known for campaigning to end slavery in the British colonies. Now he turned his attention to the plight of animals. Richard Martin, also known as Humanity Dick, had brought a court case against Bill Burns, who he alleged was cruel to a donkey. The donkey was brought into court to show magistrates its wounds.

## No compassion

At that time, compassion for animals was regarded as strange. Most people thought that animals were commodities used to supply food, transport or sport for people.

## Changing attitudes

In its early years the Society's major campaign was to win over the hearts and minds of the general public, and to change people's indifference to animal cruelty.

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## **Royal seal of approval**

By 1840 the Society's work was held in such high regard that Queen Victoria gave her permission for the SPCA to be called the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. There were five full-time inspectors, who were paid a guinea a week. Other societies started to spring up around the world.

## **Men in uniform**

The SPCA was launched five years before the police force. As the Society grew, the inspectors were given uniforms and truncheons. It was not until 1828 that the Home Secretary, Robert Peel, set in motion what would be the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 – which was the start of the modern police force in England.

## **The RSPCA today**

The Society has many staff in England and Wales, including 323 inspectors and many volunteers. It is a charity and receives no government funding. It looks after ALL animals, including:

- farm animals
- wildlife
- pets
- research animals.