



History of Cats

An insight into the domestication of cats

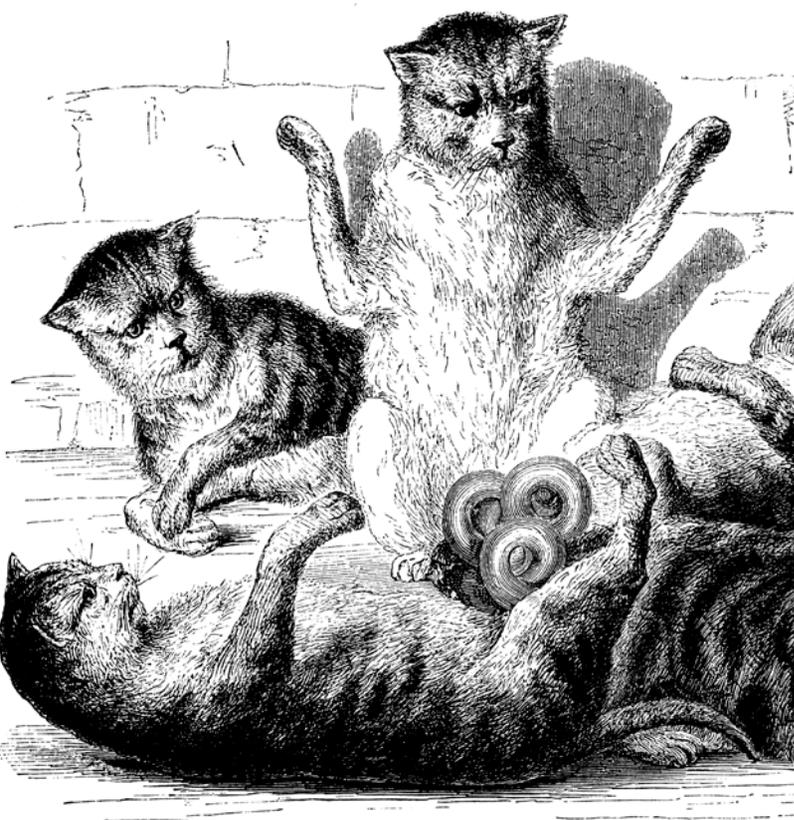
10,000 BC-21st Century

Neolithic | (10,000 BC)

- Remains of a cat have been identified from the pre-pottery Neolithic levels of a site in Cyprus dated to around 7,000 years ago. This indicates that the cat must have been taken there as there is no fossil record for the presence of the cat in Cyprus before human immigration.
- The remains of this cat show that, although cats may have been human companions, they were still as large as a wild cat, and belonging to the Libyca race.
- During this period, stone and clay figurines of cats have been found with human possessions in the Middle East. Cyprus boasts this is the oldest strong evidence of a “pet cat” - the remains of a feline that was not slaughtered for food but instead buried with a human being, both of them laid out carefully and pointing in the same direction.

Ancient Egypt | (3100-2686 BC)

- It is clear that by the second millennium BC the cat was a fully domesticated animal in ancient Egypt.
- Later all wild animals in Egypt were made sacred. This is described by Herodotus writing in about 450 BC: “When a man has killed one of the sacred animals, if he did it with malice prepense, he is punished with death.”
- It is assumed that the Ancient Egyptians were the first to domesticate cats to control vermin and other pests to protect stores of food.
- The cat’s first name in Egypt was Myeo or Mau.
- If a cat died in a private house by natural death the residents would shave their eyebrows.
- The pharaohs were mummified and buried with statues of cats as this represented good luck and safe companionship in the afterlife.



Before Christ | (500 BC)

- From 500 BC, the cat is increasingly found in artistic representations and as skeletal remains at archaeological sites.
- The cat was more valued as a pest destroyer than as a pet and didn't yet achieve the popularity or status of the dog.
- During the Song Dynasty, a cat was given to the Emperor of China and cats became the most popular pet of the rich. Cats in China were bred with local breeds and produced breeds we now know as Siamese and Burmese.

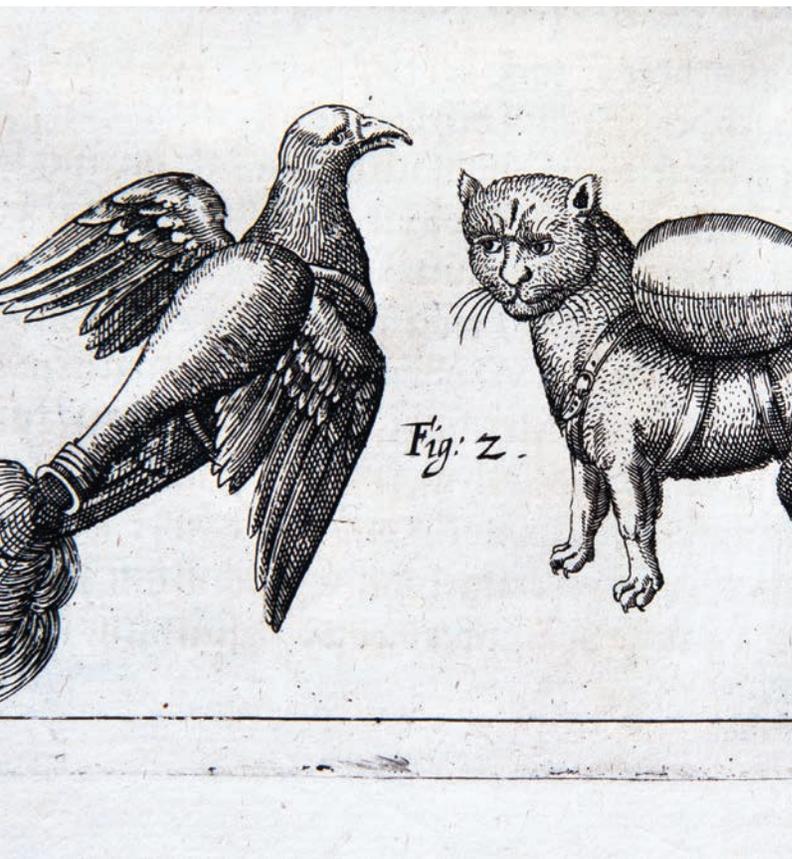
Anno Domini | (100 AD)

- 100 AD is when the cat found "The West" - the British Isles and Europe.
- Cats were introduced to Britain, where they were protected by law and seen as sacred and valuable animals. Killing a cat during this time was punishable by death.



Middle Ages | (500-1500 AD)

- During the Middle Ages cats were associated with superstition and witchcraft. This was the time of 'The Great Cat Massacre', which saw an estimated 50% of the feline population in Europe culled for superstitious reasons.
- When the Black Death began in 1348, the rulers ordered killing of all cats, as they believed cats spread the disease. However, the killing of cats meant that the population of rodents boomed and this spread and worsened the pandemic. Many believe that this mass killing of cats cost millions of lives.
- A phrase in a book written during the Dark Ages gave rise to the idea that cats have nine lives. English author and satirist William Baldwin wrote in his book 'Beware the Cat', "It is permitted for a witch to take her cat's body nine times." During this time, as thousands of "witches" were cruelly burned at the stake, many unfortunate cats accompanied them to their terrible deaths.
- The domestic cat was nearly as familiar as it is today, at least in Britain, although its numbers were still fairly low.



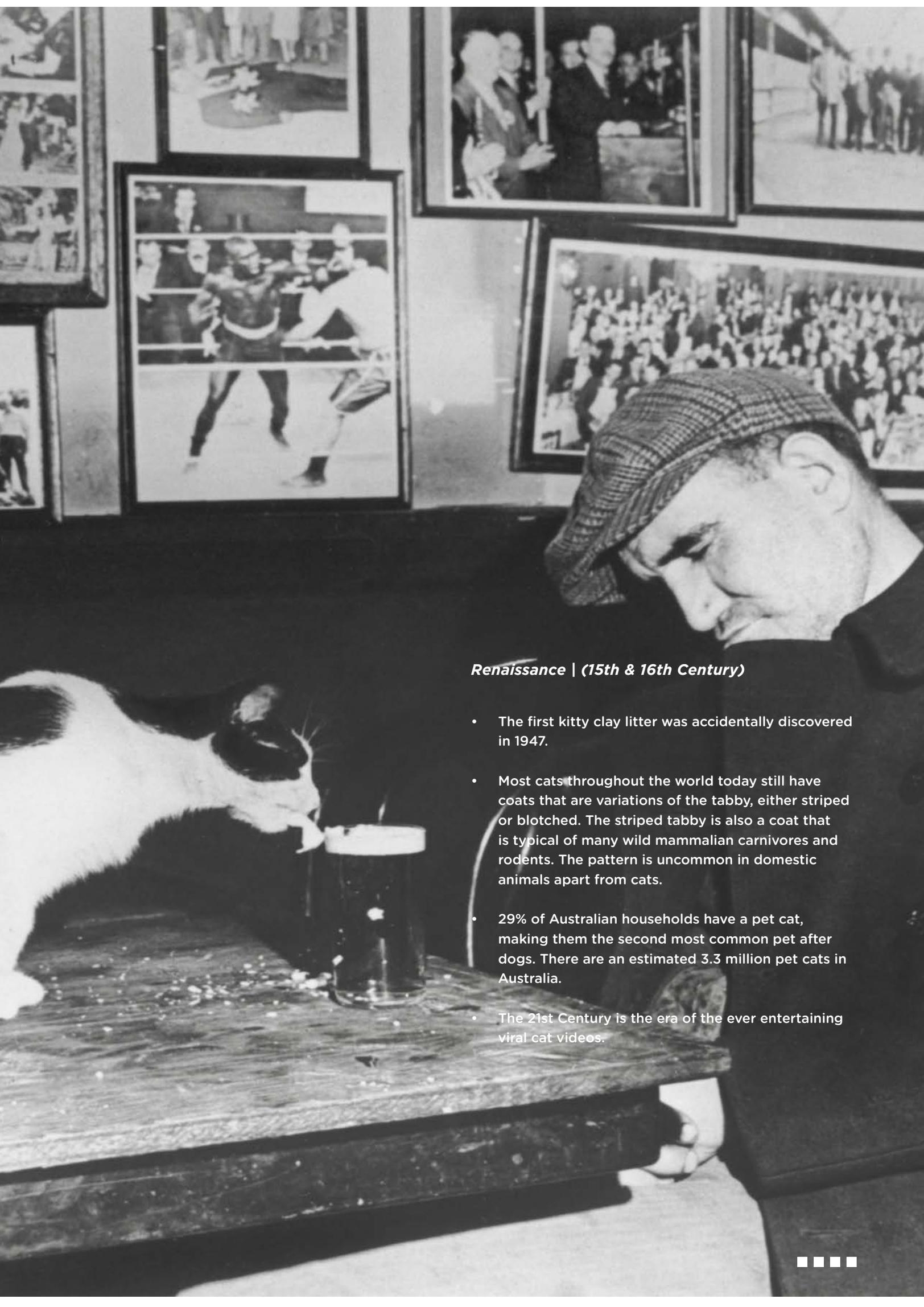
Renaissance | (15th & 16th Century)

- This was the time that certain breeds were being recognised and civilisation started to tinker with cat genetics. It is believed that cats on board a ship that crashed off the shore of the Isle of Man, United Kingdom, were the first known pedigree breed, the Manx. Also, what is now known as the American Shorthair is believed to have originated from these ships.
- Cats originating from the ship in which Christopher Columbus discovered America were left in the country and thrived.
- During the 15th and 16th Century cats were used on ship voyages to control disease and rodent populations.
- The 16th Century was the era of the “flaming cat.” There are a bunch of etchings from this time detailing how to attach flaming “backpacks” to cats and birds in order to set fire to besieged cities.
- There was a superstition present that if the body of a cat and a rat were built into a house they would keep away rats. This belief survived as late as the 18th Century.



Industrial Revolution | (17th, 18th & 19th Century)

- The 17th Century was the era of burning witches, and cats were burned along with them. Cats were increasingly more feared for being associated with witches.
- The 18th Century was when civilised society decided creating breeds was a great idea and started selectively breeding for colour and type. Breeds such as the Chartreux, Korat, Siamese, Burmese, and a now extinct breed known as the “Chinese Lop” became recognisable breeds.
- Cats continued their service as mousers throughout history, even serving as official employees of the United States Postal Service as late as 19th and early 20th Century.
- The first “cat show” in America was held at Madison Square Garden in 1895.
- Queen Victoria made cats popular pets again. Prime Ministers, even Kings and Queens all owned cats during this period.



Renaissance | (15th & 16th Century)

- The first kitty clay litter was accidentally discovered in 1947.
- Most cats throughout the world today still have coats that are variations of the tabby, either striped or blotched. The striped tabby is also a coat that is typical of many wild mammalian carnivores and rodents. The pattern is uncommon in domestic animals apart from cats.
- 29% of Australian households have a pet cat, making them the second most common pet after dogs. There are an estimated 3.3 million pet cats in Australia.
- The 21st Century is the era of the ever entertaining viral cat videos.