

**James Bowen
and
Street Cat Bob
London**
(2011+)
(page checked January 2026)



In 2007 James Bowen was living in a one-bedroom council flat in north London, recovering from heroin addiction and a life on the streets, and earning a meagre living as a busker (street musician). It wasn't a very fulfilling existence and his prospects didn't look good. Until ...

Bob makes an appearance

One cold March evening James went home and found an injured and hungry ginger tomcat in the stairwell of the block of flats where he was living; it seemed he might have been attacked by a dog, or maybe a fox. James, who says he'd always liked cats, 'spoke to' him and found him friendly, but didn't feel that in the circumstances he could take him in — and anyway he might have belonged to someone. But when the cat was still there 36 hours later he felt he had to act. He took the cat in, gave him some food and drink and asked around to see if he could find an owner. No one in the neighbourhood claimed the cat, and James could see that he had a nasty abscess on a back leg. So he took him to the RSPCA's Harmsworth Animal Hospital to be treated, spending some of the last of his money at the time on antibiotics. The vet thought he was probably not yet a year old. James felt he then had to keep the animal at least for a couple of weeks to ensure he received his medication and recovered, so off he went to buy some cat food. Then he had to go out with his guitar to try to earn some more cash.

[The two photos below were both taken in 2009, well before the pair started to become better-known.]



He continued his busking and **Bob**, as he was now called — after a character in the TV programme *Twin Peaks* — would be waiting for him when he returned home. The pair gradually got to know each other, and James was finding that Bob, although certainly not perfect, was quite special. It didn't seem as though he was, or had been, a house cat and he insisted on doing his toileting outdoors. James was still thinking that when he had regained his health, Bob would want to move on. Bob, as his condition continued to improve, had other ideas, though! When James left to go busking, the cat would try to follow, despite his best efforts to send him home. Eventually he gave in.

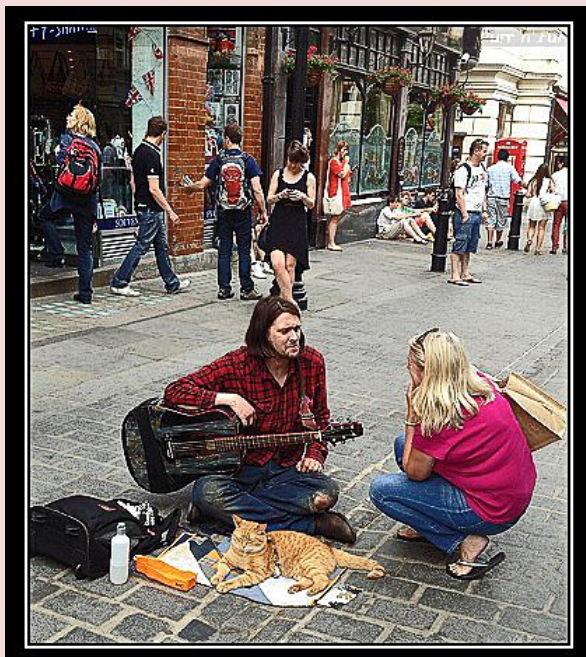
Bob goes busking

To cut a long story short, Bob started to accompany James, travelling on his shoulder on the busy London streets, on buses and the Underground. While James was playing his guitar and singing, Bob would sit calmly on his bag, or in the guitar case, with remarkable poise and equanimity. The effect on the day's takings was dramatic; as James put it, the cat made him no longer 'invisible', as people stopped to chat, stroke Bob and take photographs. In due course Bob gained a proper harness and lead for his safety, he was neutered and microchipped — and became a very important part of James' life. 'He's what I wake up for each day now,' said James.



All went well until during 2008 it became obvious to James that he couldn't continue to make a living from his street performances; he'd been in trouble for performing where he shouldn't, had had warnings from the police and knew he'd be in real trouble if he offended again. He therefore applied to become a [Big Issue](#) seller, and was accepted — it was something he'd done previously for a short time. It's a weekly street newspaper, written by professional journalists and sold in several countries of the world by homeless or similarly disadvantaged people; they buy the papers themselves and sell them at a

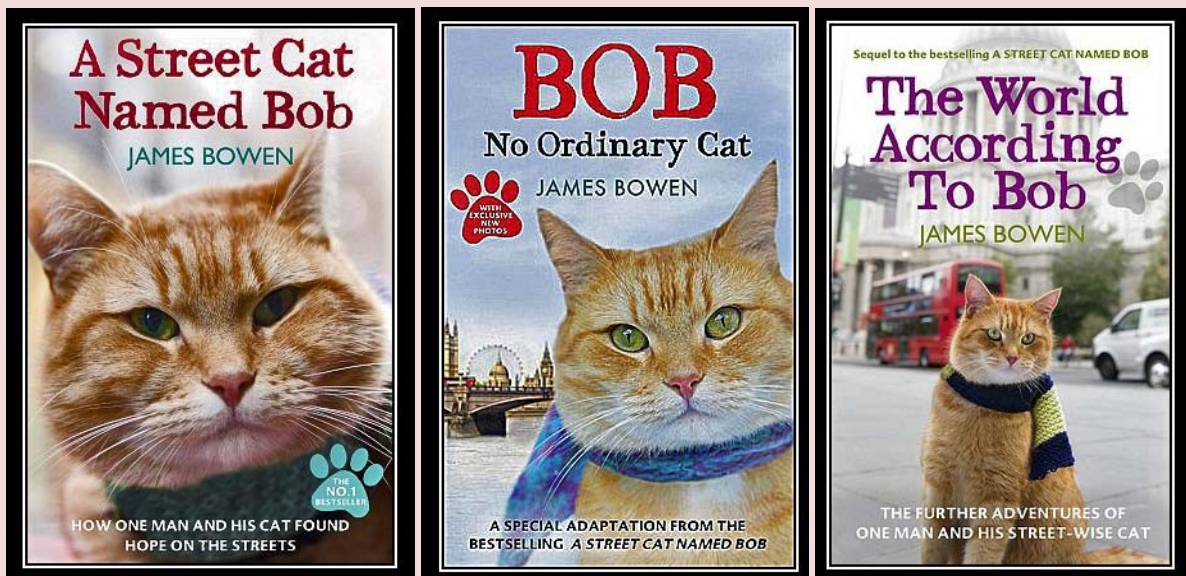
profit, giving them a chance to improve their situation. Sellers have to be registered, and each usually has a particular spot, or 'pitch', where they are to be found in their town or city. James' usual spots were near entrances to the Underground ('tube') stations at Angel, Islington and at Covent Garden. Because of Bob's popularity at the Underground stations and his frequent travels around London, Transport for London presented him with his very own special Oyster card. (*Oyster is a plastic smartcard that can be used instead of paper tickets by putting pay-as-you-go credit on it.*)





The books and TV

As before, Bob continued to accompany James, and there's no doubt he helped to improve *Big Issue* sales. The unusual pair started to feature on the internet. One day one of the people who saw them at their pitch was Mary Pachnos, a literary agent who had previously acted as the UK agent for *Marley and Me*, a book about a mischievous dog who forms a special bond with his human family. She thought that James and Bob's story, and their unique relationship, would also make good book material. The rest, to quote an oft-used saying, is history! A book deal was agreed during 2011, and in 2012 *A Street Cat Named Bob* was published by Hodder and Stoughton (*below left*, and also see details and review in [Folios](#)). Its success was immediate and almost worldwide, and it's been translated into nearly 30 languages; a children's version followed the adult book (*below centre*). In 2013 a second book appeared, *The World According to Bob* (*below right*), and also sold very well; sales of the two books together had already reached a million by 2013 — and the first one wasn't released in the United States until July 2013.



Book signings — with Bob, of course — became very popular in London (*below*); the cat took it all in his stride, although after a while James banned flash photography from these occasions, and stopped everyone from petting Bob, as he was getting a little stressed by those things. A nice idea was the website [Around the World in 80 Bobs](#), showing the book against backgrounds of places where it's been read.



There were several appearances on national TV in the UK, in which Bob sat calmly next to James, as good as gold (*below right*): one example is ITV's [This Morning](#) (April 2012) where Bob's seen wearing a scarf; he soon gained a huge wardrobe of scarves that admirers sent in for him, many of them knitted specially. Another of his trademarks was that James taught him to 'high five' with one of his paws when James held up his hand.

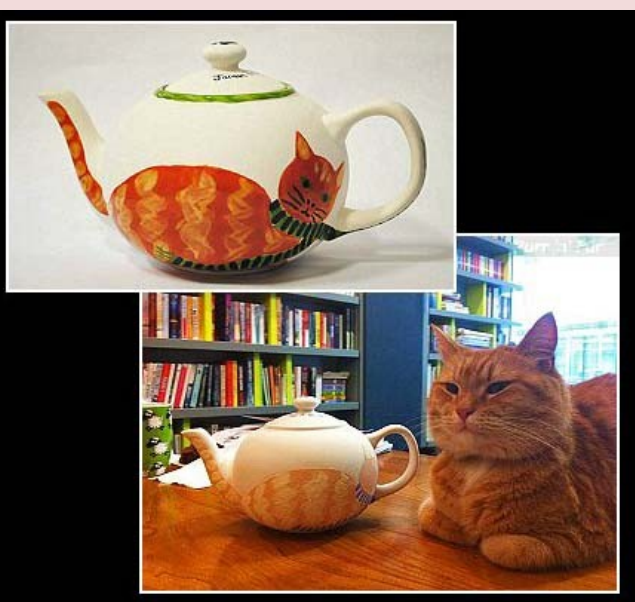


In April 2013 Bob and James attended the televised British Animal Honours, which celebrate the achievements of the country's most extraordinary animals and the people who work with them. He was awarded the 'Tails of the Unexpected' Honour (*below left*), a special award given to an exceptional animal or individual that falls outside the regular honours categories.



Charity work

Naturally a huge internet presence arose, with avidly followed social media pages — see the links below. On the home front, James said that 2012 had totally changed his and Bob's lives, and so in 2013 he wanted to start repaying some of those who had helped them to transform their fortunes. In particular he chose [Blue Cross](#) (*below left*), the charity that had regularly treated and supported Bob in the past, when times were hard for him and for James, and that every year makes a difference for thousands of cats, dogs and other pets. A campaign was opened at JustGiving where anyone could make a donation to the charity, and it was successful to the tune of over £21,000. In addition, and as some other celebrities have done in the past, James — with Bob's assistance, of course — helped to paint a special teapot cleverly featuring Bob's portrait and signed by the two of them (*below right*). The pot was auctioned on eBay and raised £680 (around 1000 US dollars at the time) for Blue Cross.

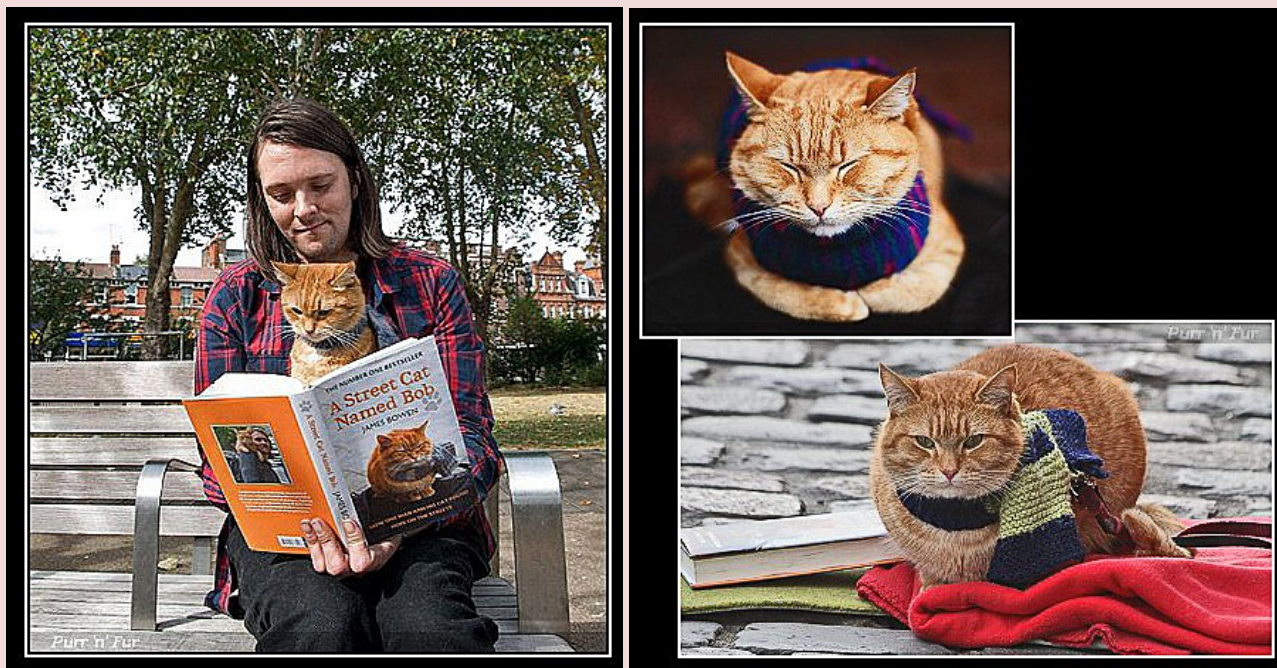


And then ...

Two further children's books were planned, but at the time not another adult one. An exciting possibility was a Hollywood film, but nothing definite had yet been decided about that; if it came to fruition there would be the prospect of a trip to the United States for the pair. Earlier James said that he wanted to renovate his London flat, but later he spoke of leaving London and finding a home for Bob and himself in the country. One idea James mentioned earlier was to register Bob as a Care in the Community animal, so he could take him to old people's homes and care centres. 'Animals are great for calming the

spirit when you're stressed,' he explains. 'Bob certainly helped me in that way, and I'd like to help other people in that way too. Maybe I'd have to take some courses in community care or something like that.' I don't think this plan was followed through, though.

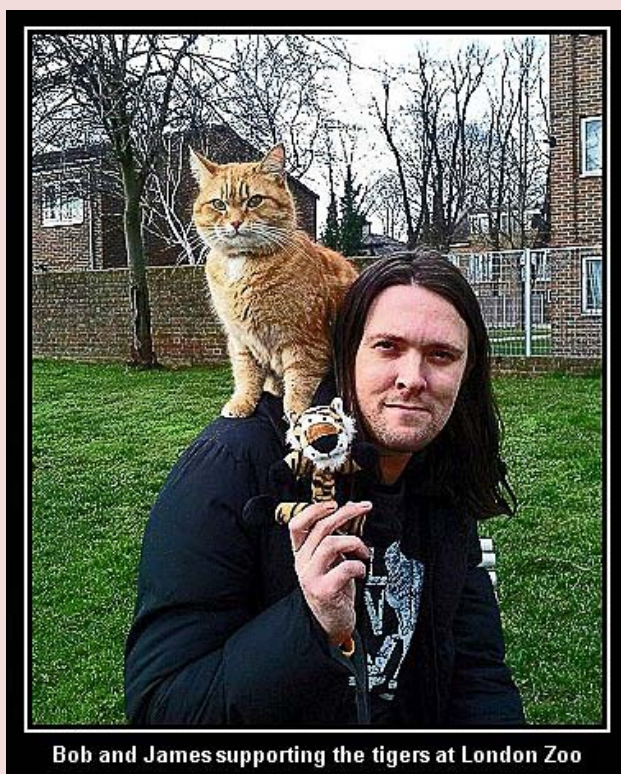
Whatever was going to happen next, it was an absolutely amazing time for James; he said that he no longer needed to go busking or selling *The Big Issue* — and he didn't hesitate to put it all down to the ginger cat who entered his life in 2007.



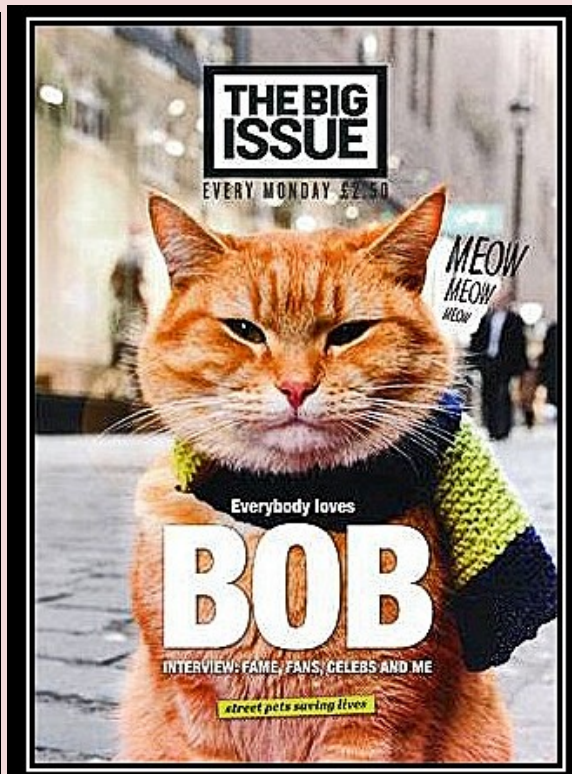
Updates

Late 2013

As noted above, following the success of his books James was able to give up busking and selling the *Big Issue*, and much of his and Bob's time became devoted to book signings and charity work. By mid-December 2013 the target figure of £20,000 (around US\$33,000 at the time) for the Blue Cross had been reached via the JustGiving site mentioned above — a great achievement! Earlier in the year an event we didn't hear much about was a scheme run by ZSL (London Zoo) to raise money to buy giant toys for the zoo's Sumatran tigers, Jae Jae and Melati, to play with in their new Tiger Territory, opened in the same month by the Duke of Edinburgh. It seems that certain well-known cats were given tiger toys to play with, publicity shots were taken and then the toys and 'pawtographed' photos were auctioned on eBay. Downing Street [Larry](#) was one cat that took part, and Bob was another — in fact he raised the largest amount (see photo below left).



Bob and James supporting the tigers at London Zoo



March 2014

It was reported that total sales of James' books in the United Kingdom had reached a million — a figure that few authors achieve. 'It's incredible,' he said. 'When I first saw Bob on the doorstep, I never thought this is where I'd be today.' There's an interesting article in the [Guardian](#).

September 2014

The wheel turned full circle in July when Bob was featured in *The Big Issue* with his photo on the front cover (*above right*). A signed copy was auctioned in aid of the charity. James and Bob continued to raise funds for other causes, such as Cats Protection, and also ran an appeal for a dogs' home at Manchester, a large part of which had been destroyed by fire. In October another book was published, *A Gift from Bob*.

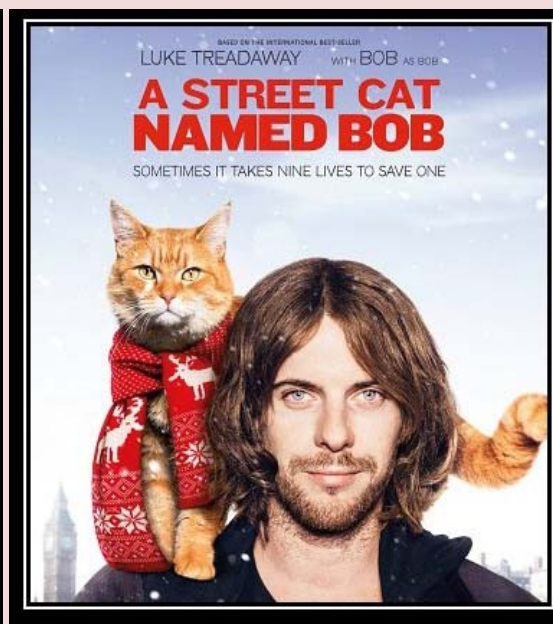
February 2017

Since the last update James and Bob had become firmly established as 'celebrities': quite a remarkable change in fortunes for a former drug addict and a stray cat! James's original book had been translated into over 40 languages. and as well as the sequel book, *The World According to Bob*, there have been four children's books, a picture book that was a spin-off from the blog *Around the World in 80 Bobs*, and then *A Gift from Bob*, which is a short story about Bowen and Bob's final Christmas on the streets together. Worldwide sales of books stood at more than five million.

There was an ambitious project to set up a cat café in London to help homeless cats; a fund was launched and the target exceeded with donations from fans and supporters. However, the practicalities of actually finding a suitable site and then dealing with all the myriad regulations that would have been required to get the scheme off the ground seem to have overcome the initial enthusiasm, and in the end it was admitted that it wasn't going to happen. Money remaining was given to other charities. More can be read at the [Daily Mail](#) (*Nov. 2016 – archived copy*).

Much more successful was the realisation of the plan to shoot a movie based on James and Bob's experiences. This came to fruition in 2016, opening to good reviews following a London première at the Curzon, Mayfair in early November that was attended by Kate, Duchess of Cambridge. The part of James was played by Luke Treadaway. The original plan was to use 'Bob-alikes' in the form of six specially trained acting cats from a top animal trainer in Canada — but Bob had other ideas! He stole the show

while one scene was being filmed in his familiar territory of Covent Garden, and from then on it was decided he would play himself in as many scenes as possible, while the look-alikes would perform the more dangerous scenes, such as being pursued by a large dog. More about the filming, as related by James, can be seen at [The Big Issue](#) (Nov. 2016 – *archived copy*) and there's a TV interview including Luke at [YouTube](#).





Bob
with the Duchess of Cambridge
at the film premiere in London
3 November 2016



Bob and James
meeting the press at
the film screening in Berlin
December 2016

Following the film James was doing some touring around the UK, with Bob, to promote it: Bob became quite a seasoned traveller with his specially designed cat carrier, and accompanied James to book-signing events in various cities. He has even been abroad, to the Netherlands and twice to Germany, first promoting books and more recently the film. It was still hoped he might at some time visit the United States. Meanwhile James continued his charity work at home, notably for homeless people and for animal charities.

December 2019

A second movie, *A Gift from Bob*, was in production! The plan was for Bob to come out of retirement to appear as himself in a number of cameo roles, and it was hoped the film would be in cinemas in time for Christmas 2020. However, the coronavirus scare pushed the filming back; and it wasn't actually released until early November 2021; I believe filming was completed before Bob's untimely death (*below*). Bob by then was living with James and his two other cats at their south London home, and they were joined by James' fiancée Monika and her own cat. Bob had adapted to his new family 'rather well', said James.

June 2020

Tragedy struck in mid-June 2020. Although Bob was an indoor cat – but with his own 'catio', and he was often taken out to the park on a lead by James – one Saturday he disappeared, having somehow and for some reason got out. James and Monika were totally distraught and spent a miserable weekend searching for him, to no avail. But on the Monday there was a phone call from a vet not far away, to say Bob had been found and brought in – but was dead. He'd been struck by a car and had died instantly.

James was absolutely heartbroken, and it took him some days before he felt able to report to his fans the manner of Bob's death. Messages of condolence and sympathy poured in in their thousands from all over the world, such was Bob's fame and the extent to which his and James' story had touched people. Why Bob decided to go out will never be known; however, he did have quite advanced kidney disease and, although it was being treated and he should have had a year or two more, it's conceivable he felt his time had come and went off to die, as animals are sometimes known to do. Whatever the reason, it was a sad and tragic end to one of the most famous cats of recent times. He was thought to be about 14 years old.

Ironically, it was a few weeks before that James had decided to take in two more kittens, and by late June they were ready to join him. He said, 'They are adorable; I'm just sad that Bob won't get to meet them.' They helped him through the grieving for Bob, who will certainly never be forgotten by James. 'He saved my life; it's as simple as that,' he said. He began to think how a permanent memorial to his companion might be achieved.

The kittens, called Bandit and Gizmo (the one with more white) are thriving. They now have their own [Facebook](#) page *(last used April 2023)*



Links and further reading

- ❖ There were three **Facebook** pages, each used for a slightly different purpose but there is overlap between them.
[Street Cat Bob](#) is the original page begun in 2012, but from the end of 2015 its main focus has been the books, and as of March 2017 it had over half a million followers. *(no longer available, Sept. 2024)*
[A Street Cat Named Bob](#) is dedicated to the film, and was approaching 100,000 followers by spring of 2017. *(not used since 2018 except for an irrelevant 3030 post)*
[James Bowen & Streetcat Bob](#) started in December 2015 to accommodate the rest of Bob and James' activities, and some 15 months later had nearly 50,000 followers. *(no longer available, November 2023)*
- ❖ **Twitter:** [@StreetCatBob](#) (original account) and [@jamesandbobtld](#) *(original still in occasional use, other one last used Sept. 2022)*
- ❖ **Instagram** *(last used Jan. 2024)*
- ❖ **Blog:** [Around the World in 80 Bobs](#)

Other pages

- ❖ Jul 2010, Annie Mole's *Going Underground* blog: [Angel Tube Cat](#).
This was quite possibly the first site to pass on the earliest tale of Bob and James when Annie Mole, who also has a Flickr account, reproduced details and a photo, by a fellow Flickr user, of the pair outside the Angel station at Islington in mid-2010. Shortly afterwards another caught up with James for a short interview at the station and posted the clip at YouTube (can be seen from Annie's blog page linked above), and the local *Islington Tribune* (link below) also picked up on it at around the same time. In combination these sources began to spread the story more widely.
- ❖ Sep 2010, *Islington Tribune*: [Two cool cats... the Big Issue seller and a stray called Bob](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Aug 2011, Annie Mole's *Going Underground* blog: [Bob, Angel Tube Cat, gets Book Deal](#) and [Bob The Angel Tube Cat - Update](#). Annie also revisited the pair's story when the first book was published in Mar 2012: [Book Launch: Bob Angel Tube Cat's book is now on sale](#).
- ❖ Mar 2012, *London Evening Standard*: [Bob the busking cat](#). *(pay wall)*
- ❖ Mar 2012, *Islington Gazette*: [Angel station Big Issue seller and his cat sign copies of book about their moving friendship](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Apr 2012, *Metro* newspaper (interview): [James Bowen: I turned to drugs to forget my homelessness](#). *(archived copy – doesn't load correctly, Jan. 2026)*
- ❖ May 2012, *The Conscious Cat* (US site): [An interview with James Bowen, street musician and author of A Street Cat Named Bob](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Jul 2012, *Camden New Journal*: [Tale of a City: How Bob the cat became a literary smash hit](#) *(archived)*

- ❖ Nov 2012, *Islington Tribune*: [Movie stardom beckons for stray whose friendship with Big Issue seller inspired hit memoir](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Nov 2012, *Daily Mail*: [The enchanting bestselling story of a stray moggy who saved a man's life is set to be a movie.](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Feb 2013, *Islington Gazette*: [James Bowen and his street cat Bob show support for Blue Cross.](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Feb 2013, *Guardian* (interview): [James Bowen and Bob the cat.](#)
- ❖ Feb 2013, BBC Breakfast (video clip): [Bob the street cat, one man's best friend.](#)
- ❖ Mar 2013, London Zoo: [Toys for tigers at ZSL London Zoo.](#)*(archived copy)*
- ❖ Mar 2013, *Inside Housing*: [Magic moggy](#) *(archived copy)* - concentrates more on the homelessness and social housing aspect of James's story.
- ❖ Jul 2013, *Daily Mirror*: ["Bob the cat rescued me from drugs": How sick stray inspired addict to sell one million books.](#)
- ❖ Jul 2013, *TIME* magazine: [Meet "A Street Cat Named Bob": Fun Facts.](#)
- ❖ Aug 2013, The Conscious Cat (US, follow-up interview): [Exclusive Interview with James Bowen, Author of A Street Cat Named Bob.](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Sep 2013, *USA Today* (with video clip): ['A Street Cat Named Bob' puts addict on road to recovery.](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Mar 2014, *Guardian*: [Bob the Street Cat books sell 1m copies in UK\)](#)
- ❖ Aug 2015, *South China Morning Post*: [From dropout to fat cat, thanks to A Street Cat Named Bob](#)
- ❖ Sep 2015, *The Big Issue*: [James Bowen and Street Cat Bob: The Extraordinary Tale Continues](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Oct 2015, *Screen Daily*: ['A Street Cat Named Bob' to shoot in London from Oct 25; new cast join](#)
- ❖ Oct 2015, BBC World Service (5m audio clip): [A Cat's Tale](#) (may not play outside the UK)
- ❖ Oct 2015, *Manchester Evening News*: [Famous 'street cat' Bob stuns shoppers as he is spotted on owner's shoulders in Manchester Arndale centre](#)
- ❖ Jan 2016, BBC News clip: [Street cat Bob to star in movie](#)
- ❖ Oct 2016, *Telegraph*: [Street Cat Bob: 500,000 Facebook followers, five million books... meet the world's most famous cat](#), with delightful short clip of Bob's photoshoot for the *Telegraph* *(archived)*
- ❖ Oct 2016, ITV *This Morning* (interview clip): [Holly and Ben Meet The Real Street Cat Named Bob](#)
- ❖ Nov 2016, BBC News clip: [Bob the cat's acting debut](#)
- ❖ Nov 2016, Kensington Palace at Twitter (clip): [Bob's audience with The Duchess of Cambridge](#) *(archived, but video doesn't play)*
- ❖ Nov 2016, *Express*: ['Is that purring or growling?' Kate gets cold shoulder from inspirational cat at premiere](#) (with clip) *(pay wall)*
- ❖ Nov 2016, *Belfast Telegraph*: [I accepted early on that all eyes would be on the little guy sitting on my shoulder, says Luke Treadaway](#)
- ❖ Nov 2016, *Screen Daily*: ['A Street Cat Named Bob': Review](#)
- ❖ Nov 2016, Blue Cross: [A Street Cat Named Bob](#)
- ❖ Nov 2016, *Daily Mail*: [Mystery of the Bob the Cat cafe ...](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Nov 2016, *The Big Issue*: [James Bowen exclusive: Behind the scenes of A Street Cat Named Bob](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ IMDb film database: [A Street Cat Named Bob](#)
- ❖ Wikipedia: [James Bowen](#)
- ❖ James Bowen at [Reddit](#) - an 'Ask me Anything' page.

There are numerous YouTube clips of James and Bob; here are just a few:

- ❖ Oct 2011: ["A Street Cat Named Bob" The Big Issue cat](#)
- ❖ Feb 2012, Hodder Books: [A Street Cat Named Bob - the book](#)
- ❖ Jun 2012, short documentary/interview: [A Street Cat named Bob](#)
- ❖ Feb 2013: [No ordinary cat](#)
- ❖ Jun 2013, by US publishers St Martin's Press: [A Street Cat Named Bob: Coming to America!](#)

At Vimeo, a great clip using time lapse photography, of a drawing of Bob and James being created by artist Amie Hill: [James and Street Cat Bob - Time Lapse in Coloured Pencil](#) (Aug 2013).

(links checked January 2026)

(Use Edge for these) For many of the images used on this page we acknowledge and warmly thank Flickr users. By taking the following links to the originals these photos can be seen full-sized with dates, and sometimes a little further detail and/or additional shots: [Harry Mitchell](#) : [Photocritic.org](#) : [acb](#) : [Dan Chippendale](#) : [Stuff n Nonsense](#) (via Annie Mole) : [Bernie Lampert](#) : [Annie Mole](#) : [Maja Kucova](#) : [Bessandra](#) : [Fabio Lugaro](#) : [jayninety](#) : [bobsmithgl100](#) : [Gavin Mills](#) : [wedding dress fashion](#) : [Paul Riley](#) : [Leo Reynolds](#) : [Elena Alhimovich](#).

There's also a [group pool](#) at Flickr dedicated to James and Bob where many more images can be seen.

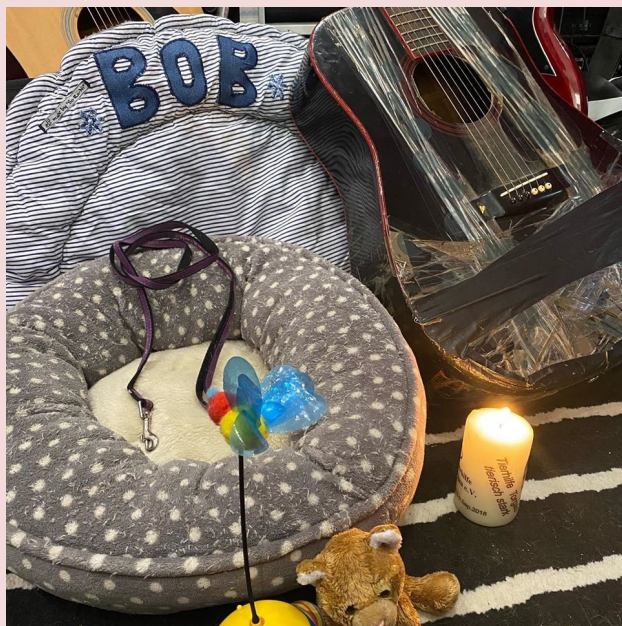


2013

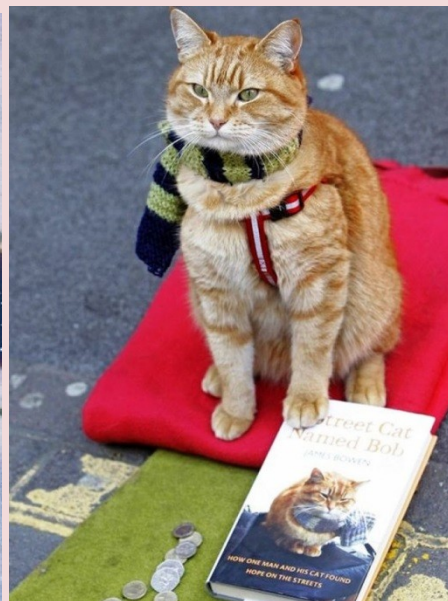




At home



Memories ...





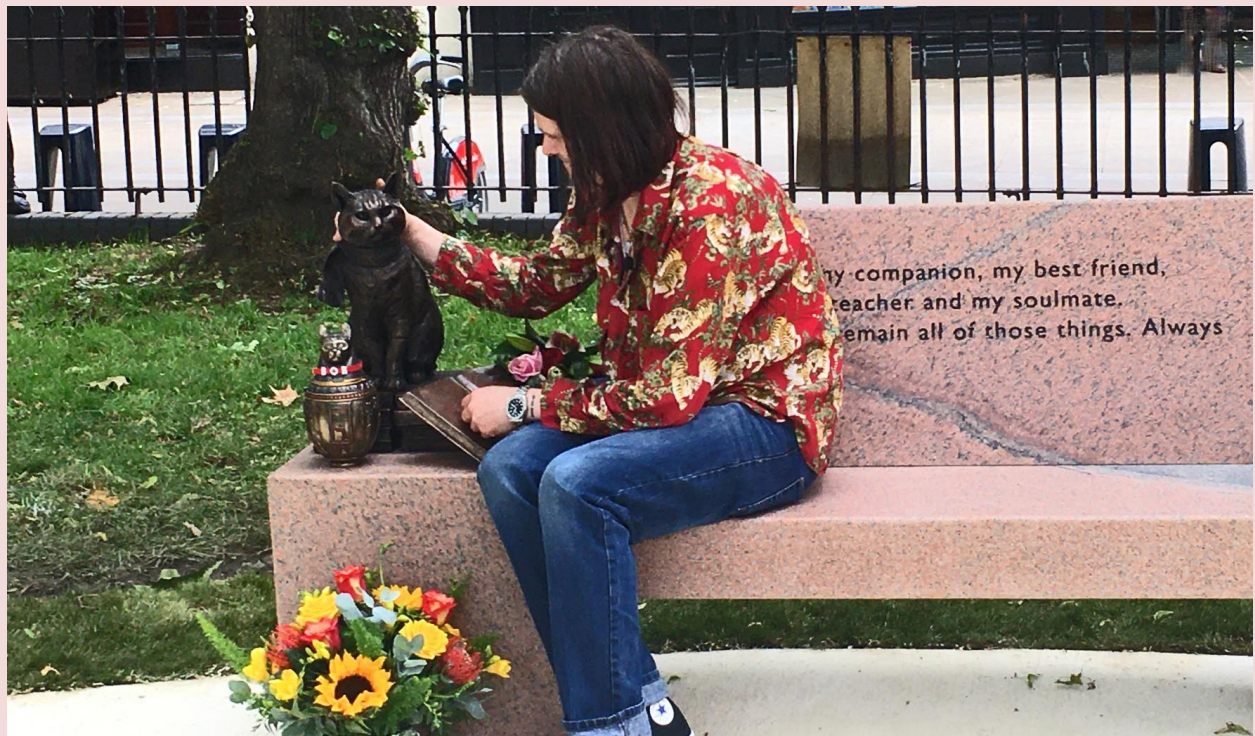
The memorial to Bob

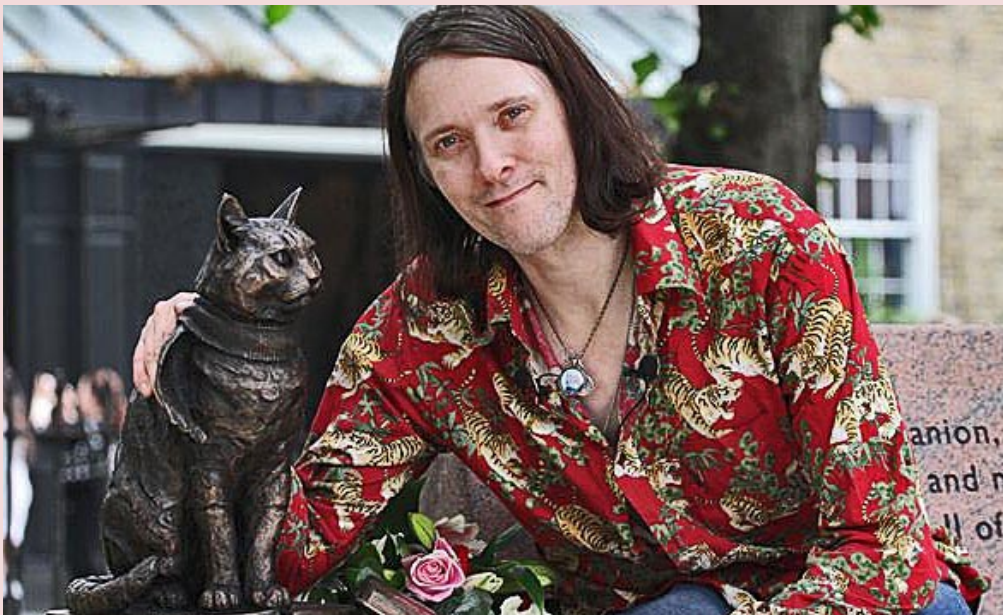
Following Bob's tragic and unexpected death in June 2020, James was determined that if possible there should be a permanent memorial. Appealing to Bob's many thousands of fans from far and wide, he set about a crowd-funding campaign. The money – I believe well in excess of £100,000 – was raised remarkably quickly. James felt that the most appropriate location would be at Islington Green, a small green area in the borough of Islington, which is directly north of the City of London. The significance of it to Bob is that it's directly opposite the Waterstone's bookshop where James and Bob first began work on their book, and where they later did their first and many subsequent book-signings. It's also near the Angel tube station, where the pair first became well-known when James was selling the *Big Issue*.

Permission for the memorial was granted by the borough council, and so work was able to begin. The sculptor was Tanya Russell, an experienced animal sculptor. She said: 'Bob and James's story has inspired adults and children all around the world with its heart-warming theme of getting a second chance. James now dedicates his time to helping numerous charities, involving homelessness, literacy and animal welfare. It was a huge privilege to be able to attempt to capture the memory of Bob for James and all Bob's fans, and I'm grateful to Islington Council who worked so hard to make the public sculpture of Bob possible.'

The bronze statue of Bob, in typical pose with one of his trademark scarves round his neck, sits next to a stone memorial bench, with the inscription, 'He is my companion, my best friend, my teacher and my soulmate. And he will remain all of those things. Always' (no full stop after 'Always'). A wooden bench is placed at each side of the central display. The memorial was unveiled in mid-July 2021, but with limited public access because of coronavirus restrictions. See live coverage of the event [here](#), and there's a *Big Issue* article covering the unveiling [here](#). The Art UK site also has nearly a dozen excellent images in a [slideshow](#) (2021). The sculptor, Tanya Russell, has a page about her [commission to produce Bob's likeness](#), which includes a lovely short film showing the process of making the bronze statue. Another of her pages has [views from all angles](#) of a miniature version of the statue, available to buy

in either bronze resin or foundry bronze.





Update, 2023

James took Bob's death extremely hard, and eventually acknowledged that it had caused him to resort again to drugs. The real story is hard to come by, but it seems he was rehabilitated again early in 2023. But his troubles were far from over; I think his relationship with Monica broke up, and he had to sell his south London house as he was unable to keep up mortgage payments. According to Wikipedia, his four cats were rehomed and James became homeless again in London. What a tragedy. There's an

Independent article from August 2023 about his situation [here](#).

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