

HORSES for COURSES

Equestrian stories from the East Riding

Horses and People

Introduction

Over the years horses have played an important part in East Riding rural life. This display focuses on the sporting aspects of horses. Historically this was the preserve of the landed classes. Horse racing flourished amongst those rich enough to lay wagers on the success of their best bloodstock. Fox hunters laid out cross-country courses to test their riding skills. Those who had seen service in the Raj in India brought back the game of polo.

This display looks at famous horses and their breeding, and sites where horse races have been held past and present. It also tells of events, some of which are unique to this area, some for professional riders and others for amateurs.

The role of horses on the land, on the road, for the young and the disabled, at war and in peace, must wait for a future exhibition. This exhibition has been researched and produced by Rural Life volunteers at Skidby Windmill. Anyone who is interested in joining the volunteers producing new exhibition should contact Skidby Windmill.

An East Riding First - 'Lottery'

An East Riding horse called Lottery ridden by Jem Mason was the first officially recognised Grand National steeplechase winner in 1839. He was bred by Peter Jackson of Long Riston and was later sold to horse dealer John Elmore at Horncastle Fair in 1836.

The race in 1839 with over 50 runners was run over 4 miles through ploughed fields, high banks, ditches, a stone wall and two hurdles.

One rider, a Captain Becher who had a distinguished career, was thrown over his horse into a brook. He remounted but was thrown again at the next brook. Captain Becher later remarked, "I never realised how disgusting water tasted without the benefit of whisky". The course's most famous and perilous obstacle later became known as 'Becher's Brook' in his honour.

'Lottery' was a tough, game steeplechaser and full of running he jumped the last fence in grand style, clearing 33 feet. He won easily by three lengths, finishing in 14 minutes 53 seconds, and became a legend.



Merry Hampton



Lottery

Right: Stables at Wood Farm, Priory Road, Cottingham, where racehorses and shire horses were bred.

Below: John Simons Harrison's stables on Priory Road Cottingham.



'Merry Hampton'

Mr John Crowther Metcalf Harrison was a breeder of racehorses in Cottingham. His stables in the Haligate area occupied part of the estate of Kingtree House, which was approached off Newgate Street.

In 1884 he handed over the stables to his son John Simons Harrison, who bought a yearling at Doncaster for 3,100 guineas (£3,255). This proved to be a good bargain as the horse 'Merry Hampton', was entered for the Epsom Derby of 1887 and won easily.

John Simons Harrison carried on the livery stables for fifty years, eventually expanding into the area of Priory Road Cottingham, where the livery stables are still to be seen. He became world famous as a judge and breeder of blood and racing stock.

Wood Lane Farm on Priory Road was also used to breed racehorses and Shire horses and was reputed to have bred the horse 'Altisidora'.

Racehorse Breeding

During the course of the 19th century thoroughbred horse breeding in East Yorkshire developed as an important rural industry. A majority of owner-breeders were wealthy landowners with a gentry background as the setting up of a new stud farm required significant investment to provide stabling, accommodation and pasture. In the early 19th century most kept a small stud of fewer than six mares. Costs for a mare's accommodation and feed whilst at a stud were around 7 shillings a week in 1800, rising to just over 8 shillings by 1813. By mid century the charge was 9 to 10 shillings.

The stud groom's care was most important as they assisted at the foaling of mares and kept day-books that had records of coverings and horses going in and out of the yard. Their earnings between 1800 and 1820 ranged from 5 shillings to 1 guinea (21 shillings) depending on the stud fee.

Thoroughbred stallions became a popular draw at agricultural shows, but travelling thoroughbred stallions were at the lowest end of the market. In the 1830's each followed a particular circuit, such as Hull, Brandesburton, Driffield, Market Weighton, Howden, North Cave, South Cave and Beverley.

Most breeders bred purely for the love of horses, not profit, and having the honour of seeing their horse's success.

The General Stud Book

The General Stud Book was the original breed registry of horses in the United Kingdom. It was specifically used to document the breeding of thoroughbreds and related foundation bloodstock.

In 1791, James Weatherby published an introduction to a general stud book, which was an attempt to collect pedigrees for the horse racing at that time and those that had raced in the past. It was filled with errors and not complete but its popularity led in 1793 to the first volume of the General Stud Book, which was more accurate and contained more pedigrees.

The book is still published by Weatherby's every four years recording the breeding records of all thoroughbreds. The latest in 2013 being volume 47.

It is said that all thoroughbred racehorses can be traced back to three stallions, The Byerley Turk, The Darley Arabian and The Godolphin Arabian.



The Darley Arabian



The Byerley Turk



The Godolphin Arabian

Sir Tatton Sykes bart.



Carving of Sir Tatton Sykes on horseback on his monument.

One of East Yorkshire's most famous aristocratic jockeys and horse breeders was Sir Tatton Sykes of Sledmere. Born in 1772 he devoted his life to farming and equestrian pursuits. He died on March 21st 1863 in his ninety second year. He was well known around the race meetings at Beverley, Doncaster, Malton and York for more than half a century. He was Master of Fox Hounds for more than forty years only relinquishing the position at the age of 70.

As a jockey he had few equals. In 1817, in his forties, he rode from Sledmere to Aberdeen, with his racing jacket under his waistcoat and a clean shirt and a razor in his pocket. After winning the Welter Stakes there he reached Doncaster in time to see the St. Leger run. He covered the 720 miles in six days on a little brood mare. Apart from a little stiffness the horse seemed none the worse for the feat. He was also a keen horse breeder and founded the Sledmere Stud in 1801. He was so fond of his horses that he could never part with them and had over 320 grazing on the parkland. Although most of them were never entered into races he did take third place in the Derby in 1837 with Phosphorus and second in the same race twenty years later with Black Tommy.

When Sir Tatton died he was mourned by family, friends and tenants alike. His admirers subscribed to the raising of a monument in his memory. This stands on top of Garton Hill, above Sledmere, and is a familiar local landmark visible from all around.

A Yorkshireman was once asked what were the three things best worth seeing in the county. He replied "York Minster, Fountains Abbey and Sir Tatton."



Sir Tatton Sykes leading Sir Tatton Sykes.

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Courses

Beverley Racecourse

Beverley Racecourse is an important thoroughbred horse racing venue. Its annual meeting was first established in 1767 and its first grandstand was built in that year. A subscription fund had been set up and raised the £1000 needed for its building, designed by the famous John Carr of York. The money was raised by the sale of 300 silver tokens which gained free entrance for the subscriber.

There had been earlier, irregular, races since 1690 on the "tan gallop" west of Newbegin Pits. Then in 1764 the course was moved to the Hurn pasture adjacent to the Westwood. Racing stopped between 1798 and 1805, but later in the 19th century a 3-day meeting took place annually in the week after the York May Meeting.

Use of the Wolds topography distinguishes the course. It is right-handed and flat (i.e. no jumps) and just over 1 mile 3 furlongs in length. However, it is characterized by tight turns and a stiff uphill finish. This feature is most pronounced in the 5 furlong course which has one of the most pronounced "draw-biases" in the U.K. This means that on the sharp right-hand bend, on land which is sloping to the left, a position on the inside-rail is the most advantageous for runners. This is only decided by drawing lots by the riders.



Silver subscription tokens (John Stusar)



The 1797 grandstand (ERALS)



Spectators on the 1767 stand (Christopher Atkinson)

Squire Watt of Bishop Burton

Richard Watt III was the grandson of Richard Watt of Liverpool, merchant and sugar planter in Jamaica. The first Richard Watt bought the Bishop Burton estate in 1783 and it passed eventually to Richard III.



THE ALTISIDORA
Bishop Burton pub sign

Squire Watt, as he was known, was a well known racehorse breeder and trainer. He owned 4 St. Leger winners between 1813 and 1833, the most famous of which is now commemorated by the name of the pub in Bishop Burton. 'Altisidora' won the St. Leger in 1813, trained by T. Sykes.

In 1885 the Watt Memorial Plate was provided in memory of Squire Watt's son William who died in 1874. The trophy is still competed for to this day at Beverley. The Watt estate is now the site of Bishop Burton College.



Squire Watt's racehorse 'Altisidora'

ENGLAND'S OLDEST HORSE RACE



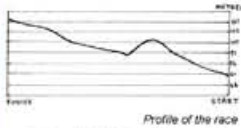
The Kiplingcotes Derby is said to be the oldest flat race in the country reputedly starting in 1519, but certainly endowed in 1619.

In the sixteenth century the local gentry had major interests in horses and betting. Each year they wanted to know how a horse had survived the winter and whether it was fit for the coming flat racing elsewhere. At that time the Wolds consisted of open ground with shrubs which formed ideal ground for hunting. There were no roads and few tracks so that the area gave a gruelling test of a horse in a race over hilly, open ground. In the early days there was probably more than one race.



Map showing the route of the Kiplingcotes Derby

Then in 1619 such notables as the Earl of Burlington, Sir John Hotham, Sir Marmaduke Constable, Sir Robert Hildyard and Sir Hugh Bethel subscribed £365 to ensure that the "Kiplingcotes Plate was ridden early on the third Thursday in March"



Profile of the race

There is no course as such, as the horses run along a straightish road, sometimes on tarmac, sometimes on a wide grass verge. It crosses two country lanes, a bridge over a disused railwayline and one major road (the A163). The distance is specified as 4.5 miles but the long section, drawn from the map, shows varied heights which make it even more daunting. The start is at 160 ft above sea-level, rising to 368 ft over Goodmanham Wold, dropping to 303 ft after the old railway bridge. From there, there is a slight dip before a steady climb up Easthorpe Wold to 438 ft through a muddy green lane before crossing the main road and levelling out to the finish on Londesborough Wold.



Start marker with an OS bench mark

Dalton Park

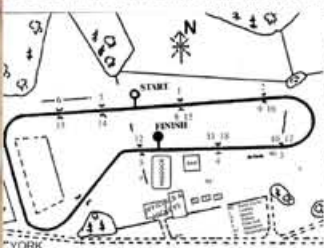
The sport of steeplechasing began in Ireland early in the 18th century. The first recorded race was in County Cork between two towns over a distance of 4½ miles. The start and finish were marked by church steeples. In Britain the first races were cross country events through fields and over obstacles such as hedges and brooks. Such competitions were popular with fox hunters who were skilled in the terrain and had horses bred for the task.

Eventually circular racecourses were built incorporating the same types of obstacles. The most famous steeplechase is probably the Grand National, run at Aintree and originally known as the Liverpool Grand Steeplechase. It was first run in 1836 over a distance of 4½ miles (like the original Irish race).



18th Grand National

The amateur version of steeplechasing is called Point to Point. For sixty years the Holderness Point has been run on the course at Dalton Park, near Beverley, with the support of Lord Hotham. The race is a distance of three miles over 18 fences about 4 feet 3 inches high made of birch, broom and spruce. They are at least 10 yards in width; the first fence must be at least 14 yards wide.



Map of Point to Point course at Dalton Park

Hedon Racecourse

The racecourse on Twyer's estate near to Hedon was opened in 1888 and had its own railway station which brought hundreds of visitors every race day.

The first recorded race meeting on the 24th August 1888 was at the direction of the East Riding Club and consisted of 6 races including the Hedon Plate and the Astley Handicap.

The East Riding Club was formed with the sole reason of organising flat, hurdle, and steeplechase races, and the course had one of the longest 'straights' in the country.

In 1901 the races were taken over by the Hull Racecourse Company Limited and they remained in charge until the final meeting in 1909 when the railway station also closed.

Hedon Aerodrome operated on the site in the years before the First World War.



Burton Constable Race Course

Burton Constable Hall near Sproatley has been the home of the Constable family for 700 years. The Stable Block was built in 1770 designed by architect Timothy Lightoler. In the 19th century the stables contained four carriage houses with stalls for the hunters in the north block, and stalls for old hack horses and draught horses in the southern block. In the attic of the stables there were bedrooms for grooms and servants, with a men's room and a singing room.



Stable block



Map of part of the Burton Constable Estate. The racecourse is top left.

The Clifford Constables were passionate about hunting and in 1842 a Riding School was built. An forested area called Norwood was cleared at the end of the 18th century. A private racecourse was laid out by 1838 and remained there until 1850. The Burton Constable Meeting had numerous races with different distances, prizes, handicaps and rules. An annual steeplechase was run under the patronage of Sir Clifford Constable and the Holderness Hunt. After that the stables were somewhat neglected, the Stable Block has now been restored and gives the history of the stables which is well worth a visit.



Restored stables



Stable yard

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An Album of Events

Kiplingcotes Derby 2014



At the start



Weighing in



At the finish



Approaching Entrance



Side saddle



Four in a row



The Trophy



The Winner

Holderness Point to Point 2014



Polo at White Rose Polo Club

Polo is the fastest ball game in the world with the players on horseback reaching high speeds. The exact origin of the game is unknown but it was probably first played by nomadic warriors over 2,000 years ago. The game became used for training cavalry and was played from Constantinople to Japan in the middle ages.



British tea planters in India first saw the game in the early 1800's, and in the 1950's the British Cavalry drew up the first rules. The sport of Polo was well established in England by the 1870's.

Polo had an influence in light horse breeding second only to that of racing. In the polo field as on the racecourse it is the performance that tells, the pace and stamina of the polo pony are put to a severe test as the pace and stamina of the racehorse.

Rules of Polo

There is no 'season' in polo as in other games like cricket or football. A full game consists of 4,6 or 8 'chukkas' with each chukka involving seven minutes of play, after which a bell is rung and play continues for 30 seconds or until the ball goes out of play. A three-minute break is given between each chukka.



Between each chukka, each player will dismount and change ponies. Sometimes a fresh pony is ridden in each chukka or two ponies will be on rotation, but will not play more than two chukkas. The ball is hit with a stick or mallet wielded by each mounted player towards the goals at each end, and the game is played right handed.

Racing Colours

Contests between horses were arranged by their owners from very early times. In early races, horses would be ridden by the owner, his groom or stable lad, and in order to distinguish between the contestants they would wear their owners' livery.

Racing colours or Jockey Silks probably originated from owners' livery colours and had simple geometric shapes.

The British Horseracing Authority now allows only 18 sets of colours to choose from. No two sets of colours can be exactly the same and must be based on a choice of patterns and shades laid down by the authority.

Racing colours are comprised of three elements, the Jacket, Sleeves and Cap.

The jacket might be compared to the Armorial shield.



Examples of racing colours

17 SHANNON WALKER

KACIE MAE

18 CAROLYN BALES

WOT EVA