

Friends of the National Horseracing Museum

SUMMER 2015 NEWS SHEET

MY TIME AT PALACE HOUSE STABLES

Lord John FitzGerald

One cold morning in November 1981, three days after leaving the Army I found myself at Palace House stables about to embark on a spell as an unpaid Pupil Assistant. This I did for 8 months then after 18 months as Assistant to H Thompson-Jones I returned to Palace House as Assistant Trainer to Bruce Hobbs.

Bruce Hobbs stood over six feet tall with a ramrod straight back, he had great charm, beautiful manners and a twinkle in his eye. Always turned out in a jacket and tie, he was referred to by all the staff as “Sir”, a trainer of the old school who was worshipped by his staff and highly respected throughout the town. He had won a Military Cross in North Africa and his records in the Grand National still stand today: the youngest winning jockey at 17, the tallest winning jockey who rode the smallest winning horse (Battleship).



3 March 1952 — 3 August 2015

Two lots a day were ridden out by a male-only staff. Each lot one and a half hours, no more no less. My arrival coincided with the worst winters I have ever known. On one particularly cold and unpleasant morning it looked as if this lot was going to be cut short and thoughts of a long warm breakfast were going through our minds. Just as we got to the edge of the heath, Bruce Hobbs shouted from his hack ‘take a turn’ and we headed out again for another ten minutes, him leading — he led by example and would never ask anybody to do anything he would not do himself.

The trainer would look around every horse during evening stables, I would accompany him with a bucket of carrots. When owners or guests came the same procedure would be followed, except the full pedigree and progress of every horse would be given, the bad getting as much attention as the good. This could take some time as there would be about 90 horses spread sometime amongst four yards in town. This could impinge a little on some of the staff’s social life, but I have to say I found these rounds one of the most enjoyable and informative of my time there.



Lord John on his first winner

Bruce Hobbs was a brilliant horseman and probably one of the best judges of a yearling in his time, but he was not just a good judge of horses, but also of people. I had spent ten years as a very unsuccessful amateur rider, riding in just over 100 races and accounting for two winners, including a quite recent novice chase at Uttoxeter. Despite this illustrious record I was severely restricted in riding work, due to the fact I was now classed as a fat boy. So when another fat boy, in this case a teenager on holiday from a NH trainer joined us for the summer, I was delighted to have an ally and wasted no time in informing him of the pitfalls of attempting to become a National Hunt Jockey. We were allowed, once a week, to do a swinging canter together on two particularly nice, but backward, two-year-olds. Bruce Hobbs saw things differently and asked the travelling

head lad Frank Crozier to get him a price on this unknown boy being Champion Jockey within five years. Within a few weeks he gave him his first ever ride in an amateur riders race on the July Course on the hard-pulling Mardi Gras. This story has no fairy tale ending as Mardi Gras disgraced himself, causing our young hero nightmares for many years and it took Richard Dunwoody six years to become champion jockey.

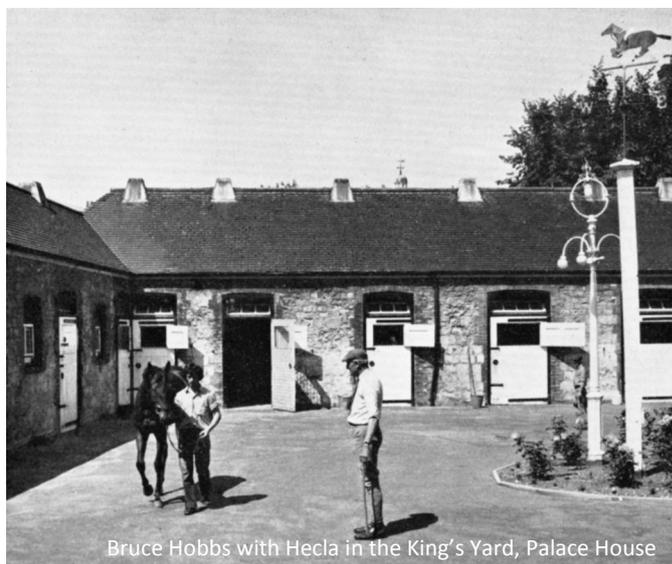
But of course it was the horses that made the stable. Bruce Hobbs was a salaried trainer for Palace House Stables Ltd, whose shareholders were primarily well established

owner breeders, they were literally a dying breed, the previous decade had been dominated by American owners and American-bred horses and now the Middle East owners were beginning to make their presence felt. None of these new owners were to find their way to Palace House. Just before I arrived the founding Chairman of Palace House Stables Ltd, Jim Philipps had sold his stud, Dalham Hall, and its entire stock to Sheikh Mohammed. Then the remaining Directors decided that they would not renew the lease on the stables from the Rothschild family when it expired in 1985. Still, when I arrived the stables had two promising colts for the following seasons classics. Count Phalen the winner of the William Hill Futurity (Racing Post Trophy) and Zilos the winner of the Seaton Delaval stakes. Sadly neither really excelled at three, Count Phalen won the Epsom Blue Ribbon (Epsom Derby Trial) and then disappointed afterwards. Zilos had a few early season places and would then finish second to Touching Wood in the St Leger. An unusual British Classic in that the first two home both wore blinkers. The first horse I saw on arrival at Palace House was a two-year-old filly. She was Acclimatise who would win the Solario Stakes at two and at three finish second in the Oaks before winning the Nassau Stakes.

By the time I came back as Assistant the cupboard was pretty bare. But the one bright light was a four-year-old called Gay Lemur. He had been a good handicapper at three and at two was one of the rides that the 'two fat boys' would share on their weekly work sessions. He started the season by winning the Gp 3 John Porter Stakes, to be followed two weeks later by the Gp 2 Jockey Club Stakes. He then sustained an injury whilst preparing for the Coronation Cup. Three painful months in a plaster cast before he could be prepared for his next race. This was to be the Gp 3 St Simon Stakes. I was sent to Newbury that day to saddle him as Bruce Hobbs was at Doncaster. It was a memorable day as he won comfortably, making it three wins in Group company from three runs. I also believe that this may have been one of Bruce Hobbs' finest training performances. Personally for me a great day, as this was the first Group winner I had saddled and on a horse I had ridden regularly as a two-year-old. A new beginning for me, but sadly the end of a number of eras. For Gay Lemur was the last Group winner to carry the famous Straw and Rose hooped colours of the Rosebery family, he was the final Group winner to be trained by B R Hobbs M.C. and the last Group Winner to be sent out from Palace House Stables.



Lord John riding Tanias Lad at Cartmel



Bruce Hobbs with Hecla in the King's Yard, Palace House

The Friends are saddened to hear of Lord John FitzGerald's passing away. Lord John was a great supporter of the museum and we are grateful to his family for choosing the Friends as beneficiary of donations made in his memory.

The National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art at Palace House

Christopher Garibaldi, Director



Palace House, first floor gallery

We are making exciting progress at the new site – always remembering that across a total of five acres in the heart of Newmarket we are not only restoring and building a new National Horseracing Museum, and a flagship home for the Retraining of Racehorses charity (which will allow us to accommodate retired equine heroes of the sport), but also in Palace House itself creating a National Gallery of British sporting art.

Perhaps the most significant milestone is the fact that by the time you read this we expect to have been handed back Palace House by the building contractors. This will allow us to introduce the environmental monitoring equipment which provides the data necessary to allow lenders to release their paintings. One of the beautiful panelled gallery rooms on the first floor can be seen here. These rooms will accommodate sporting paintings from the BSAT, Tate Britain and public and private collections from across the UK.

It is so satisfying to be moving from the theoretical to the actual with loans being formally confirmed,

new buildings taking shape and the first areas nearing completion. The display contractors have started working on the specialist exhibition displays that will go into the museum's galleries. For regular updates on the project and our opening in 2016 please look at the website: www.nhrm.co.uk – New Site News – and thank you to everyone who has supported this fantastic project.



Restoring the stable boxes

The Betfair Newmarket Open Weekend

19-20 September 2015

This year the Open Day has been extended to the whole weekend and includes a Food Festival. On Saturday the public are welcomed onto Warren Hill gallops and there will be the opportunity to visit Tattersalls, The National Stud, Newmarket Equine Hospital and the National Horseracing Museum. There will be racing at the Rowley Mile in the afternoon and on Sunday trainer's yards will be open between 9am and 12.30pm before further entertainment at the Rowley Mile.

For full details and to book tickets go to: <http://www.newmarketopenweekend.co.uk/>

Friends Events

For 240 years the family firm of Weatherbys has provided British horseracing with its central administration, acted as its clearing banker and maintained the founding register of racehorse breeding. We would like to give you an insight into the role Weatherbys plays within the racing industry; highlighting the different areas of service and providing an opportunity to meet some of the Weatherbys team.



WEATHERBYS

Weatherbys have invited Friends of the National Horseracing Museum for an exclusive visit to their offices on Wednesday 9th September for a tour of the organisation followed by lunch. The price of the tour is £35 which includes lunch. You will need to make your own way to Weatherbys.

(Weatherbys, Sanders Road, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 4BX, Tel: 01933 440077, www.weatherbys.co.uk)

Itinerary—Wednesday 9th September

10.15am Arrive at Weatherbys
Coffee/Overview

1.30pm Buffet lunch
2.30pm Approximate departure

10.45am Tour of the departments
Horse Registry
Racing Service
Racing Operations
Commercial Services
Bloodstock Services
Bank
VAT
Insurance

Email friends@nhrm.co.uk to book a place (and arrange car share) or write to:

Friends of the National Horseracing Museum
National Horseracing Museum
99 High Street
Newmarket
CB8 8JH

Quiz Night with Mike Cattermole

Friday October 2nd at Dalham Hall Stud, 6.30pm for a prompt 7pm start

Pick a team and pack a picnic for the Friends Quiz Night.

Entry £10 per person (payable on the night)

Space limited so please email to book: friends@nhrm.co.uk

THE FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL HORSERACING MUSEUM

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