

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2013

**Colwall
Village
Society**

Revealing Our Heritage

NATIONAL HUNT RACING AT COLWALL PARK RACECOURSE [Part Two] 1900 to 1939 by Nicholas Neve



The Racecourse looking southeast towards Castle Farm.

© Aerofilms Ltd.

This aerial photograph was taken on 7th June 1933. In the foreground the Worcester to Hereford railway line divides the racecourse from the village. The racecourse runs beside the railway, before turning left handed into the 400 yard

finishing straight. The permanent steeplechase jumps are visible spanning halfway across the course. The hurdles were removed between race meetings. The new Totalisator building can be seen in the public enclosure opposite the grandstand, paddock and finishing post. The foothills below British Camp can be seen in the background.

Continued from the January 2013 Newsletter:-

The problems associated with the ownership of the course continued however. It was yet again offered for sale at an auction which took place on November 25th, 1915, this time at the Park Hotel. It was stated to be let to the Colwall Park Race Company on an annual tenancy for a rental of £363 p.a. Pencilled notes in the document indicate that a bid of £2,100 was made but £3,000 was anticipated. It was again presumably not sold as it was offered again for the fourth time in 1919. At this sale in the Star Hotel in Worcester, the racecourse lot was withdrawn despite a bid of £8,000, the Malvern Gazette recorded. Mr Cave-Browne-Cave was seen attending the sale and despite having been wounded twice in the recent war, was reported as being "in the pink", but the report goes on to describe him as being a former resident.



Colonel J Scott-Bowden

Soon after, in 1920, a Colonel Johnathon Scott Bowden OBE. bought both the Park Hotel and Brook Farm and joined the company running the Racecourse, becoming secretary of the club. Later in the 1920's he also bought the Racecourse and racing continued without a break. He was a vet by profession and his wife was a keen horsewoman and was involved with the remount centre in Worcester. They owned "Jimmy" a cream coloured horse which was used by the official starter. Jimmy suffered the indignity of being stolen at one time and painted to avoid recognition.

Between the two wars four meetings were arranged every year, - March, April, May, and either September or October for the autumn meeting, usually on a Monday, and Colwall presented a very lively scene each time. Attendances averaged around 3,000 and on Monday 28th May 1934 there were 4,511 paying customers recorded, of these 3,501 paid half-a-crown (12½ p.), 719 in the ring and paddock (Gentlemen 12s. 6d, Ladies 8s. 6d. (62½p., 42½p.) while 291 Members were in the club enclosure.

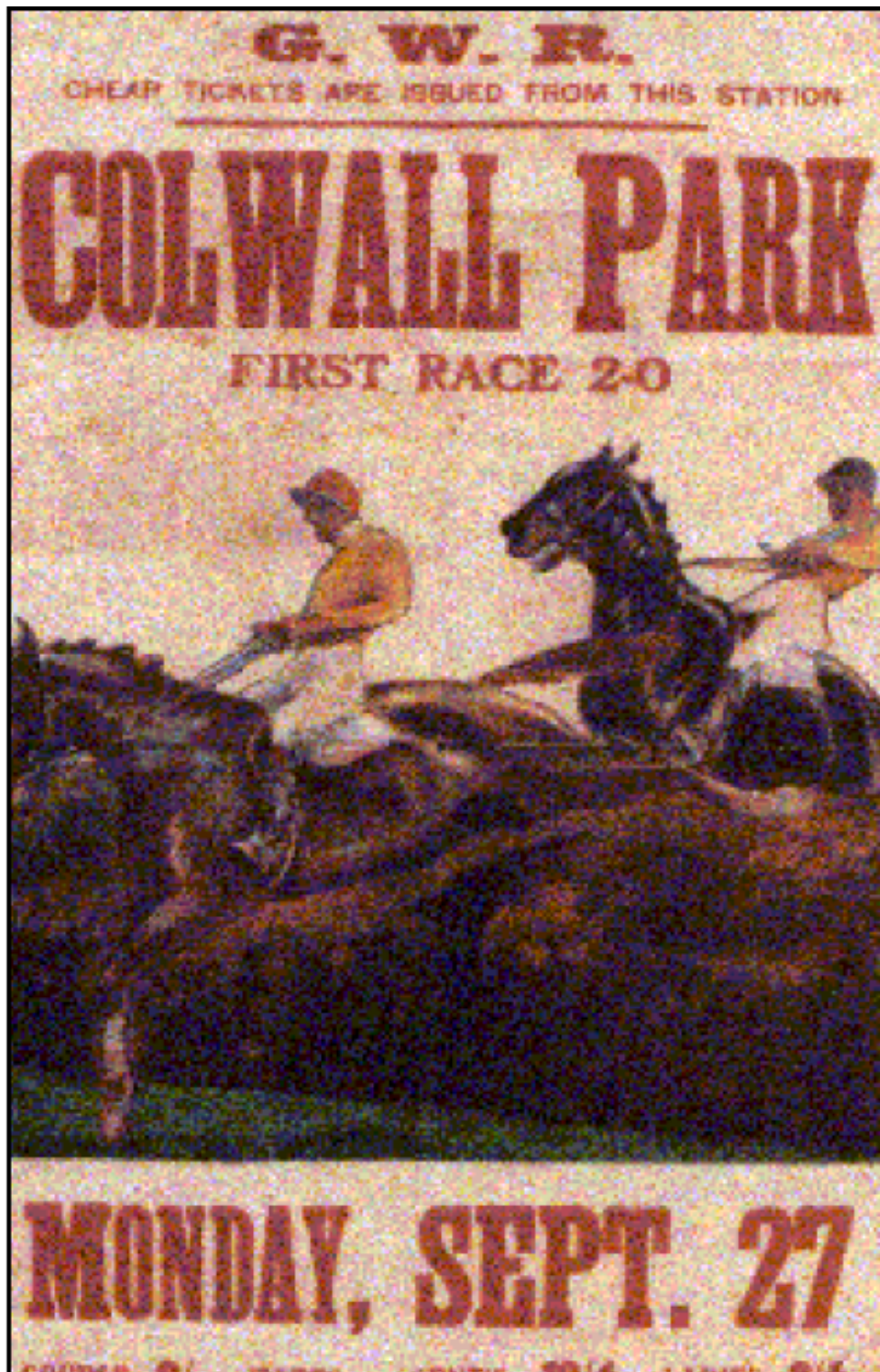
During the 1920s two horses who were to go on to win the Grand National at Aintree became associated with the course. Perhaps the most fortunate winner of the Grand National, until the victory of "Foinavon" in 1967, was Tipperary Tim", who in 1928 and starting at odds of 100-1, was one of only two finishers. He was the only horse to complete the race without a fall, most of the rest of the field having contrived to lose their jockeys on the Canal Turn the first time around, giving his jockey Bill Dutton an unexpected win for his owner Harold Kenyon. Tipperary Tim had started his career by winning a novice chase at Colwall Park in October 1923. Then in 1932 "Forbra", trained locally by the well known Rimell family, and who had exercised frequently, but in some secrecy, on the Colwall Park Racecourse, went on to win the Grand National, ridden by James ("Tim") Hamey, at his first attempt starting at odds of 50 to 1.

The 1920's and 30's were a period of peace and the races brought in money and created jobs in the village. Mr Rowland James, the well known local builder of Upper Colwall, was responsible for the maintenance of the course, still under the direction of Mr Connop.

His daughter recalls that concerning the work done at the race course by Rowland James' men, mention should be made of the unique shape of the holes cut in the three lengths of floor board joined together to form a seat to go on top of each temporary lavatory bucket. Ern Staite, the carpenter, would get the three joined boards, put his felt hat in their centre and run his pencil around the outside, and then cut out the holes. It was not until around 1927 that the roads became sealed with tarmac and the use of the railway declined. Horses started to be transported by road. Private cars became more commonplace but special trains, "race day specials", offering cheap tickets still brought bowler-hatted miners from the pits in South Wales, and other race-goers from Hereford, Kidderminster, the Midlands and the Cotswolds. This was indeed the heyday of racing at Colwall, Mr George Grundy, who for many years kept a family grocers shop at the Wyche Cutting, recalls that as a lad he and some other boys from Colwall used to set



up an unofficial car park on Colwall Green and charged sixpence for its use. Shortly before the race meeting was due to end, they used to move up to the sharp hairpin corners on the road leading up to the Wyche and make some more money helping to push the weaker and more unreliable cars up to the cutting on top of the Malverns on their way back to Worcestershire.



Great Western Railway Poster advertising the races.

equipment - so Mr Scott Bowden perforce had to submit. Bidding started at £7,000 and the hammer fell at £10,500. Sadly the new owners had other uses for the land and it became a military vehicle park. As a consequence the land, never very well drained in the first place, became very churned up.

Some time after peace came in 1945, attempts were made to revive racing on the course and in May 1949 the first pony race meeting, one of only five held up to 20th August that year, was held. However this never caught on with the general public and the idea was abandoned. Later, in 1960, the North Ledbury Hunt held their point-to-point on what was described as "The Old Racecourse" and on 3rd April 1963 Mr. Joe Jackson Jnr, himself the son of a well

However the storm clouds of war were gathering in Europe as Adolf Hitler rose to power in Nazi Germany. The last meeting at Colwall was held on 25th May 1939. The great jockey and trainer Fred Rimell rode a winner that day in the first race on "Grayling". T McNeill rode the 11/8 favourite, Shandwick Place, to win the "British Camp Handicap Chase over a distance of 2 miles and 50 yards and to become the last jockey to ride a winner at Colwall Park under National Hunt rules. War broke out in September that year and the meeting scheduled for later that month was cancelled, marking the end of National Hunt racing at Colwall Park.

On July 7th, 1942 the racecourse was sold by Lt.-Col. Scott-Bowden at an auction in the Town Hall, Ledbury to a company called Dowsett Mackay (Properties) Ltd., who had offices in Colwall. At the time of the sale, the course was described as having a great portion fenced with concrete posts and running boards. Double turnstile boxes existed at each entrance. The particulars tell us that the number of buildings had increased, reference was made to a Tattersalls Ring with a stand, bank, and a new covered stand to accommodate 800. Also, a newly erected tea room, ambulance room and a modern two-storey number board. The two Totalisator buildings, erected in the early 1930s by Boulton and Paul, were situated one in the paddock with 27 pay windows and one on the course with 32.

The Scott-Bowdens did not want to sell, but the firm said they would apply for power from the Government to requisition it - they were contractors to the Government for assembling machinery and essential wartime

known pre-war Cradley jockey, rode "Hollybush Wonder" to win the Adjacent Hunts' Maiden race, the last race run at Colwall Park under Jockey Club rules.



Colwall Park Racecourse in 1963 from Evendine (above Sally Beds)

Very little remained of the course by 2000. A few concrete slabs marked where the grandstands once stood but little else. The only building to survive was one of the Totalisator buildings which was bought by an estate between Welland and Upton-upon-Severn where it was re-erected, complete with its little windows with steel grills, and is used as a lunch room by the local shoot. Chris Pitt in his book "A Long Time Gone" speculates that perhaps as dusk descends over Colwall, your mind's eye will conjure up a vision of dim figures galloping in the distance... Tipperary Tim perhaps, or others. You might think you hear the thunder of hooves... you might. But the horses, like the racecourse they haunt, are long since gone.

Acknowledgments:

Nicholas Neve writes: I am indebted to Mrs Pat Turner, Mrs Ruth Tipping and Mrs Sheila Evans [REDACTED] for interviewing Colonel G M Singleton, OBE, MC. and Mr. Joe Jackson Senior and for their research in books and record offices. I am grateful for their encouragement, company and cups of coffee during the research and writing of this Colwall Village Society History project. I also would like to thank Major General Logan Scott-Bowden CBE., DSO., MC., Mrs Elizabeth (Bright) Lloyd of Barton Court, Mr Joe Jackson Senior, Mr Roger Fleetwood, Mrs Cora Vale and Mrs Ann (James) Sealy for their help in piecing together this tale and the loan of race cards, artefacts, estate papers and books and Mr Ray Fish for making me a copy of a poster still in his possession. Next, I would like to thank Aerofilms Ltd of Gate Studios, Station Road, Boreham Wood, Herts, WD6 1EJ for permission to reproduce their aerial photographs. And finally many sincere thanks to Chris Pitt for his help and allowing me to quote from his book and use his excellent map of the course.

References:

1. "A Long Time Gone" by Chris Pitt, published by The Portway Press, October 1996. ISBN 0 900599 89 9
2. "A History of Colwall" by Mrs Winifred C Stringer, privately published in 1954.
3. Past issues of the Malvern Gazette and the Malvern Advertiser.
4. "A Glimpse of Old Ledbury" by David Postle, The Amadeus Press, Huddersfield.

AGM

The 16th AGM of the Society will take place immediately before the Society's 22nd April 2013 meeting. Would any member wishing to nominate a member for the committee or one of the officer positions, or to propose an item for the agenda please contact the Secretary [REDACTED] before Monday 8th April.

Future Talks

**22nd April 2013: AGM followed by a talk from
Dr Janet Cooper:** 'The Work of the Victoria
County History at Eastnor'
16th September 2013:
Amanda Simons: 'British Camp'

27th January 2014:
Gordon Wood: The Building of the Hereford to
Worcester Railway.

From the Editor

My thanks to our contributor. Any article on Colwall related subjects (however tenuous!) are always welcome. If you are prepared to receive your newsletters by electronic means, please register with the email address below. Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are **CONTRIBUTIONS!**

Newsletter Editor: Derek Rees, [REDACTED] email: cvsnewsletter@colwall.info

or hardcopy c/o Colwall Library