



Local History Collection

27 - Hawthorn Hill Racecourse

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A few years ago whilst talking to a local resident I was asked if I had heard about the racecourse that used to be near Bird's Hill Golf Course at Hawthorn Hill. So I started to investigate what I could find out.

The Hawthorn Hill Racecourse was situated between Maidenhead and Windsor, close to the village of Hawthorn Hill and the 1st race was on Monday 16th April 1888. It was the brainchild of Mr F Headington who first established the idea of races in 1887. He had the energy, drive and commitment to make it happen and acted as secretary, treasurer, stakeholder in the course and Clerk of the course. He had realised the potential of using supporters of the Royal Buckhounds to instigate steeplechases and had mooted the idea to the Earl of Coventry that it would be beneficial to landowners if their land was used to race over.



The course was set out at Redstone Farm, with a temporary grandstand transported from Egham and the race committee had some very influential Stewards, including Lord Charles Beresford and Sir Reginald Cathcart. The day consisted of 6 races for hunters belonging to farmers who let their land to be run over by the Queen's hounds, the course being nicknamed the 'Young Ascot'. The inaugural meeting was such a success that it was followed in 1889 by a programme with 6 races contested by horses of some renown. These included Billy Pepper and Orrone, both owned by Mr Headington, Binfield owned by Mr Apthorp and Water Wagtail owned by Captain Crawley. By 1890 the Household Brigade had appreciated the set up at Hawthorn Hill and decided to hold their Regimental

Steeplechases on the track, the 12th Lancers and Royal Horse Guards both enjoying success at the meeting.

Although many questioned the sense in building a racecourse in fields, Redstone Farm under the guidance of Sir Robert Wilmore, developed through the years and he ensured that the facilities improved each year. At the height of its success the course was holding 8 meetings every year including a March two day Spring meeting, in April the Household Brigade two day meeting, in May the Hunt and Spring two day meetings whilst in October there was an Autumn two day meeting. During the war a two day meeting was held on April 27th and 28th 1914 but the course then closed for the majority of the war, not reopening until April 1921.



Hawthorn Hill Racecourse





The site of Hawthorn Hill Racecourse

The last horse races were held in April 1939 although pony races continued to be held until 1949 and later. It was bought in July 1962, showjumping took place there in May 1964 and eventually it was purchased by Peter Cadbury in January 1967. It was up for sale again in 1968 and during the 1970's many other uses were considered before being taken off the market in 1979. In 1982 approval was given for a golf course to be created there.



The site today

Hawthorn Hill plan

Arab horses will race

Hawthorn Hill Racecourse will once again resound to the drumming of hooves and the encouraging though well-bred shouts of owners and their friends on July 10. But this will be a strictly private affair, organised by the Arab Horse Society. There will not be any bookmakers, nor a totalisator.

The Arab Horse Society was founded to promote the breeding and importation of pure-bred Arab horses, and to encourage the reintroduction of Arab blood into English light horse breeding.

After trying for many years, the society has recently persuaded the Jockey Club to approve the use of Arab horses for racing. This meeting will be the first Jockey Club approved event for Arab horses in this country, although they have been raced in most other countries for many years.

Although not used for racing since 1963, the course is said to be in excellent condition, though the rails are in need of renovation.

LONG HISTORY

Established in 1840, Hawthorn Hill is one of the oldest racecourses in the country. It was the home of steeplechasing and point-to-point, and was used by the Household Brigade and the Staghounds in 1896. The late Duke of Windsor, when Prince of Wales, used to ride in the point-to-point.

In April 1947 pony race meetings were transferred there from Northolt. The course could

hold a crowd of 25,000 and had parking for 3,000 cars in those days.

Pony racing lasted for about three years, and in 1952 the track was reopened briefly for trotting races.

In 1960 the site was bought by racehorse owner and breeder Mr. Laurence Lipton of The Bourne, Holyport. After eight years of lying dormant, the track was once again used for National Hunt and sulky racing and occasionally go-karts.

This ceased in 1963, and the course has since been the venue for show jumping, and Western-style rodeo.

TRAINING CENTRE

Mr. Peter Cadbury bought the course for £50,000 in 1967, "merely to preserve the view from his home at Cruchfield Manor."

The following year he put it up for sale, and there was a proposal that it should be converted to a golf course, but nothing came of it. In 1969 Mr. Philip Perrin bought 25 acres to establish a Western Rodeo Club.

In 1976, Bellbrae Ltd. of Kings Lynn applied for planning permission to establish a racecourse training centre at Hawthorn Hill. They proposed to renovate the stables, demolish the derelict buildings and build new accommodation for staff, and extra stabling. Permission was refused, but the District Council planning committee said they would be willing to consider a fresh application on a more modest scale.

"I was the owner of the 65 acres known as Hawthorn Hill, from 1976 to 1981. The site contained a 10 furlong racecourse and a block of stables and barns. It was reputed to have been used by the Household Cavalry and a favourite of HRH Duke of Windsor. The Irish grass covering the course was of such fine quality and stood out as a distinctive green ribbon as seen from the air."

The 'D' Shaped racecourse

After considerable negotiations by The Arab Horse Society, in October 1978 The first race of pure Arabian horses, under Jockey Club Rules and supervision was held at Hawthorn Hill. As there was no spectator facilities plans were being drawn up for a covered arena and major extension of all facilities. Maidenhead Borough Council, under the influence of Kit Aston, who was interested in gravel pits, rejected the plans and the property was sold at a substantial loss".

In David Nash's *History of Berkshire (the Ghosts from Berkshire Places)* there has been seen (near Moneyrow Green) a phantom horse, thought to be the racehorse 'Kruger', who was killed in a steeplechase at Hawthorn Hill (Bray) in 1901.



Youtube video
Horse Race at Hawthorne Hill (1948)

click on image