



FIRSTS, LASTS  
& ONLYS®

# HORSERACING

A TRULY WONDERFUL COLLECTION  
OF HORSERACING TRIVIA

PAUL DONNELLY



# HORSE RACING

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OF HORSE RACING TRIVIA

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FIRST  
**RACEHORSES IN  
THE OLYMPICS**

GREECE. 648 BC.

Horse racing was introduced in the 33rd Olympic Games. Jockeys rode their mounts bareback and the horses are thought to be smaller and lighter than those used in chariot racing. When the Olympics was moved to Rome in 68 BC, horse racing remained on the programme only to 60 BC.

FIRST  
**REFERENCE TO  
FLAT RACING**

Smithfield, London. 1174.

The first reference to Flat racing in England was in the 12th century when a series of four-mile races were recorded at Smithfield, London. Races are known to have occurred at various markets and fairs throughout the country throughout the Middle Ages and into the reign of King James I.

FIRST  
**RECORDED RACING  
IN ENGLAND**

THE ROODEE, GROSVENOR ROAD, CHESTER CH1 1SL. 1539.

Racing was reported at The Roodee, the oldest-surviving course in England, in 1539 (some sources date this to 1540).

FIRST

# CARLISLE BELL

CARLISLE BELL, SWIFT, CARLISLE, CUMBRIA. 1559.

Lady Dacre presented the first Carlisle Bell in 1559 with the inscription "The sweetes horse this bel to tak for mi lade Daker sake". The bell was an actual bell that was presented to the winners of the race during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Reputedly Britain's oldest horse racing prizes, the bells were believed to have vanished in the mists of time. They were found in the late 19th century in a box in the town clerk's office. They are now in the Carlisle Guildhall Museum. The Carlisle Bell is still run today at Carlisle Racecourse over seven furlongs and 173 yards and usually takes place in June.

FIRST

# RECORDED RACING IN SCOTLAND

Leith. 1591.

The first recorded racing in Scotland took place in Leith and was mentioned in the memoirs of the Earl of Huntley.

FIRST

# REFERENCE TO HANDICAPPING ENGLAND. 1603.

During the reign of King James I, handicapping was introduced. To even out the chances of each horse to win, a series of weights were added to the saddle.

FIRST  
**VISIT OF A  
 MONARCH TO NEWMARKET**

**KING JAMES I, CAMBRIDGE ROAD,  
 NEWMARKET, SUFFOLK CB8 0TF. 1605.**

King James I was the first monarch to visit Newmarket, the home of English racing. He attended a coursing match near Newmarket and was so taken with the place he moved his court from London to East Anglia. When he was on the throne the rules were written for the Kiplingcote Derby – it appears this was the first time the rules of the sport were written down. There is a record of a race held in Newmarket shortly before the King died aged 58 on 27 March 1625 at Theobalds House, Hertfordshire. He was succeeded by his son, King Charles I, in whose reign **the first grandstand at Newmarket was built.**

FIRST  
**RACECOURSE TO HIRE  
 A GROUNDSMAN**

**DONCASTER RACECOURSE,  
 LEGER WAY, DONCASTER, SOUTH  
 YORKSHIRE DN2 6BB. 1614.**

According to early records, racing at Doncaster goes back to the 16th century. A map dated 1595 shows a course where the modern-day track is. In 1600, Doncaster Corporation attempted to ban racing because they believed it was attracting the wrong sort of people. By 1614, racing was firmly established and a groundsman was paid one shilling and sixpence for “making the way at the horse race”.

ONLY  
**MONARCH NICKNAMED  
 AFTER A HORSE**

King Charles II. 1660.

Charles came to the throne after the end of the Commonwealth, 11 years after the execution of his father. He was an enthusiastic fan of horse racing and owned a number of horses. One was a stallion named Old Rowley. The King set up Newmarket, Suffolk as a national centre for horse racing and the Rowley Mile Racecourse is named for the stallion. Charles was known to have an eye for the ladies and is thought to have fathered at least 14 illegitimate children but no heir (he was succeeded in 1685 by his brother, King James II). The horse Old Rowley was equally libidinous and “renowned for the number and beauty of its offspring”. The nickname “Old Rowley” soon came to be attached to the King and a ballad “Old Rowley the King” soon became popular:

This making of bastards great,  
 And duchessing every whore,  
 The surplus and treasury cheat,  
 Have made me damnable poor,  
 Quoth old Rowley the King,  
 Quoth old Rowley the King,  
 At council board,  
 Where every lord  
 Is led like a dog in a string.

FIRST  
**FORMAL RACECOURSE  
 IN AMERICA**

HEMPSTEAD PLAIN, NEAR ELMONT, NEW YORK, AMERICA. 1665.

The first formal racecourse in America was created on the orders of Colonel Richard Nicholls (1624–1672), the first English colonial governor (1664–1668) of New York province. It was two miles in length and was on what is now Belmont Park. Nicholls named the track Newmarket. The earliest record of a race at the course is a porringer engraved in 1668 “WUNN ATT HANSEAD PLANES”. The winning owner was Captain Sylvester Salisbury, an English Army officer. A description of the course was written in London in 1670 by Daniel Denton. He wrote, “[There] lieth a plain 16 miles long and four broad upon which plain grows fine grass ... where you shall find neither stick nor stone to hinder the horse-heels or endanger them in their races, and once a year the best horses on the island are brought hither to try their swiftness, and the swiftest rewarded with a silver cup, two being annually procured for that purpose.” The course later became known as Hempstead Plain and was still holding race meetings in 1909.

ONLY  
**MONARCH TO WIN NEWMARKET TOWN PLATE**

King Charles II, Newmarket Town Plate, Newmarket Round Course,  
 Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 0XE. 1671.

Charles created the Newmarket Town Plate in 1665 with the wish that the race should be run forever. In 1671, Charles became the only reigning monarch to win the race. The race, which is over three and three quarter miles, is run on the Newmarket Round Course (the only time this course is used) on the second Sunday in October.

FIRST  
**RECORDED WOMAN JOCKEY TO  
WIN A RACE**

MRS MORTE, CHESTER. MARCH 1691.

The diarist of the *Chester Recorder* on 7 March 1691 wrote, "We rode to Farne race where I run against Sir Edmund Ashton, Mrs Morte, Mr Mackworth and Captain Warburton. Mrs Morte won."

FIRST  
**RACE AT ASCOT**

Ascot Racecourse, High Street, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7JX.  
Saturday 11 August 1711.

The racecourse was founded by Queen Anne and the first race was Her Majesty's Plate with 100 guineas going to the winner. Five horses took part. The course covers 179 acres and is six miles from Windsor Castle, which means the Royal Family are regular visitors. Indeed, it was while out riding from the castle that The Queen came across the land that would become the racecourse. On 12 July 1711, her plans for a new meet were published in the *London Gazette*. It read, "Her Majesty's Plate of 100 guineas will be run for round the new heath on Ascott Common, near Windsor, on Tuesday August 7th next, by any horse, mare or gelding, being no more than six years old the grass before, as must be certified under the hand of the breeder, carrying 12 St., three heats, to be entered the last day of July, at Mr Hancock's, at Fern Hill, near the Starting Post." No one knows why the race was delayed by four days although there is speculation that it just was not ready. In 1825 King George IV started the tradition of the Royal Procession at 2pm for each of the five days of Royal Ascot. The Royal Standard is raised and the National Anthem is played.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

In 1940, the Army commandeered the racecourse. Gunners of the Royal Artillery lived in the grandstand. The Army left in the spring of 1943 and racing began again on 15 May with an eight-race card. The first meet after the Second World War took place on 21 May 1945 and it marked HRH Princess Elizabeth's first visit to the course. The first National Hunt meeting at Ascot was held in 1965.

**FIRST**  
**USE OF THE WORD**  
**“THRO-BRED”**  
 ENGLAND. 1713.

Now a term to describe a horse bred purely for racing, the word “thro-bred” used in connection with horses first appeared in 1713. All Thoroughbreds can trace their origins to just three stallions – the Byerley Turk (c.1680–c.1703), the Darley Arabian (b. 1700) and the Godolphin Arabian (c.1724–1753) – and a number of foundation mares. Thoroughbreds were created in 17th- and 18th-century-England after English mares were mated with Oriental stallions of Arabian, Barb and Turkoman origin. In 1704, bankrupt merchant Thomas Darley bought the Arabian from Bedouin tribesmen near the ruins of Palmyra. He hoped that the horse might improve his fortunes back in Yorkshire. The horse never raced in anger but 95 per cent of all Thoroughbreds in the world are descended from him.