

# SPORT ON THE HURST - HORSE RACING

A talk given to the Molesey Local History Society by Stewart Nash on Friday 12th October 2012 at Mole Hall, Bishop Fox Way, West Molesey.

Good evening, everybody.

What I hope to do this evening is to tell you something about horse racing on Molesey Hurst.

I will start by saying a little about the history of horse racing and its organisation so that what follows in relation to racing on the Hurst is in context of the bigger picture of a national sport. I also don't intend to dwell too much on the racing itself, other than to highlight one of two famous horses, owners, trainers and jockeys but rather to look at the impact Hurst Park Races had in terms of social, culture and environment on East and West Molesey.

## Background

The origins of horse racing date back to the mists of time. A recent exhibition at the British Museum 'The Horse: From Arabia to Royal Ascot' traced the development of the modern day thoroughbred from the deserts of Arabia before the birth of Christ to the present day.

One of the oldest racecourses still in use is The Roodee at Chester and although records only date from 1540 it is almost certain that the Romans staged races on the flat plateau of land beside the River Dee tight up against the city walls. If you go to Chester take a few moments to look at The Roodee, close your eyes and see if you can imagine chariot races taking place around the tight one mile oval.

Although the racing was a rich man's sport with horses owned by the aristocracy and providing an opportunities for house parties, they also provided entertainment for all levels of society and for that reason were often 'once a year' affairs organised on open common land as part of the town's annual fair or holiday. Queen Anne was very keen on both hunting and racing and she had inherited from William III his stables at Newmarket and the Royal Stud at Hampton Court. It was whilst following the Royal Buckhounds she decided that Ascot Heath would be the ideal place for a new racecourse and so Ascot Races were born in 1711. The Derby was first run at Epsom in 1780 and the Derby along with Royal Ascot and the Grand National are perhaps the three best known racing occasions in the eyes of the general public.

The Jockey Club was founded in the mid-1700s and in due course took responsibility for setting and overseeing the rules and regulation of racing. In 1774 the Jockey Club's Secretary's, Messrs Weatherbys, first published the Racing Calendar which recorded details of all races that had taken place. Whilst the Jockey Club primarily oversaw flat racing, the National Hunt (NH) Committee which was founded in 1866 performed the same task for Steeplechasing and Hurdle Racing (in other words) jump racing. The regulatory framework established by these two bodies remains the foundation of the regulation of racing by the British Horseracing Authority today although more sophisticated and relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 1875 Sandown Park was opened. This was the first racecourse to be fully enclosed by a perimeter fence, enabling a charge to be made for admission, the course to be properly maintained and most importantly enabling the refusal of admission to, or the ejection of undesirables, thus making it a much more suitable place to enjoy a day's racing without the unwanted attentions of rogues, touts and thieves. The open courses could only charge for the entry to a stand or paddock enclosure, could not prevent people walking and animals grazing over the common land courses between race meetings and although hugely enjoyable events had no means to restrict the attendance.

Over the next twenty five years more enclosed courses were established often sited in easy reach of the rail network and at the same time many of the open courses closed often as a

result of not being able to meet the new standards expected by the Jockey Club and NH Committee.

At the turn of the century there were 147 racecourses. Some 48 of these ceased to operate by 1919 due to the continued raising of standards and the impact of WWI (although 4 new courses did open). A further 34 had disappeared by the end of WWII including Gatwick which became an airport!

Urbanisation, financial pressures and reduction in central funding has led to 15 closures since WWII. These include Birmingham, Manchester, Lincoln, Lewes and, of course, Hurst Park. And, just as I was starting to prepare this presentation the proposed closure of Folkestone and Hereford at the end of this year was announced.

## Hampton Races

Although Hampton is a Middlesex town, Hampton Races took place on the south bank of the Thames on Molesey Hurst. Prior to the railways when the population of Molesey was relatively small most racegoers would have arrived by crossing the river on the ferry from Hampton.

Whilst racing took place on the Hurst from at least the early 1700s it was not until 1814 that the meeting was recorded in the Racing Calendar and came under the jurisdiction of the Jockey Club.

The map on the right shows the layout of the Hampton Racecourse. The course was left handed (i.e. anti-clockwise) with the winning post alongside the river opposite Platt's Eyot (red arrow). From the winning post the course bore left (approximately where Hurst Park primary school now is) and then followed inside the line of Hurst Road before bearing left opposite Hurst Lane to join the finishing straight alongside the Thames.



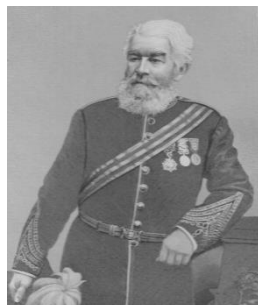
Hampton Races normally took place in June and usually consisted of two, sometimes three, days. They were certainly successful meetings attracting huge crowds and for a period in the mid-1800s a second meeting was added in the autumn. Charles Dickens referred to the meeting in *Nicholas Nickleby* and by all accounts the racing may almost have played second fiddle to the sideshows, betting booths and all manner of other entertainment. The nearest you get to that today would be Epsom on Derby Day (which is one of the few open courses to have survived) although even that is greatly diluted from years ago and Cartmel in the Lake District which regularly attracts crowds of 20,000+ on the Spring and Summer Banks holiday and has a huge fairground in the centre of the course.

For the reasons I have outlined earlier Hampton Races suffered from all the problem of open meetings. Contemporary reports clearly indicate that theft, drunkenness and violence were commonplace and the course had become very rutted and dangerous and that was a major reason for the Jockey Club refusing to licence any more meetings after 1887. The final meeting taking place on 15 June.

Other open courses in Surrey that had already ceased to operate by then include Egham (on Runnymede) in 1884, Guildford (1870), Reigate (1864) and Streatham (1878). Croydon carried on until 1890 when the behaviour of racegoers resulted in it being refused a licence and racing transferred to another new enclosed course at more rural Gatwick.

## Hurst Park

Following the cessation of racing on the old Hampton course a group of wealthy sporting dignitaries formed the Hurst Park Club Syndicate with the intention of establishing a new enclosed racecourse on the Hurst.



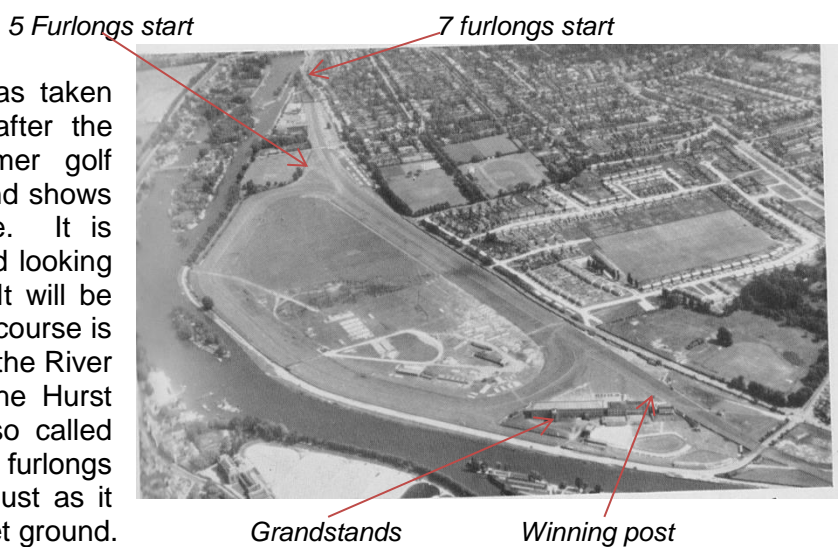
The President of the Syndicate, who was also prominent in designing the course, was Lt-Col Sir John Dugdale Astley (left). Known as “The Mate”, Sir John Astley was one of the best known and best liked characters in racing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Dugdale was a lover of all sport, but racing was his passion and he put considerable effort into the creation of Hurst Park which he describes in his biography “Fifty Years of My Life” published in 1894.

Astley was supported in the new venture by a Committee of 38 including many leading members of the Jockey Club notably the Dukes of Bedford and Portland, the Marquis’s of Drogheda and Cholmondeley and the Earls of Hardwicke, Mayo, Enniskillen, and Dudley.

Jump racing started at Hurst Park on 19 March 1890 less than three years after the closure of Hampton, but at that stage the syndicate did not own the land to the east of Hurst Lane and therefore the course was only a mile round and more importantly did not have a sufficient straight course to allow flat racing. Without a year round programme of flat and jump racing the course would not have been viable and little time was wasted in negotiating the purchase of the necessary land from Mr Kent to enable the eastern bend to be extended and a seven furlongs straight to be constructed. The first flat race meeting was held on 25 March 1891.

I will now turn to the topography of Hurst Park racecourse and the changes that took place between the time it opened in 1890 and its closure in 1962.

The aerial photo (right) was taken just after World War II (after the development on the former golf course had taken place) and shows virtually the whole course. It is taken from the western end looking towards Hampton Court. It will be seen how the layout of the course is constrained by the bend of the River Thames and the line of the Hurst Road. This lead to the so called ‘straight course’ over seven furlongs actually having a dog-leg just as it passes East Molesey cricket ground. The five furlongs was straight as it started just to the side of East Molesey cricket ground scoreboard.



The round course was about one mile and three furlongs round and right handed (clockwise) so that the winning post was alongside the Hurst Road i.e. the opposite way round to the old Hampton Course. It was also virtually level.

The restricted site also meant that the grandstands had to be sited at 45 degrees to the Hurst Road so that racegoers in the stands viewed the horses coming at them head on, which is not the best way to view a finish. As you look at this picture the Members’ Enclosure (restricted to Members of the Hurst Park Club and their guests) was on the right, the Tattersalls Stand (primarily frequented by professional punters) in the centre and the

Silver Ring (the better enclosure for the general public) on the left. The majority of the general public would have watched from the level ground of the centre course enclosure. I will talk a little more about class system on race courses and attendances later.

The layout adopted at Hurst Park was subsequently used as a blueprint when Phoenix Park racecourse in Dublin was constructed.



The photo (left) taken in 1928 from a similar (but slightly more westerly) position than the one above is particularly interesting as it clearly shows that prior to WWII the course did not continue across Ferry Road (which had been part of the old Hampton course) and that the 'pulling up' area beyond the winning post course was a loop continuing round behind the stands. This meant that the public area behind the stands was much smaller than in later years. At this time the racecourse stables were in New Road (now Kelvinbrook).

The photo on the right provides a closer view of the eastern end of the course. Taken in 1928, before the houses along the north side of Hurst Road, the riverside pleasure grounds and Upper Deck swimming pool had been built, shows the six and seven furlong starts on the chute which crossed Graburn Way and the five furlongs start by the cricket ground.



It will be seen that the famous landmark of the gates on Graburn Way (which are still in place) are also missing as these were not constructed until 1950. There was another identical set where the course crossed Ferry Road by which point the horses were no longer racing but pulling up. Apparently because of their height and appearance the erection of these gates met with considerable local opposition but were undoubtedly necessary, given the increase in road traffic after WWII to reduce the risk of horses getting out onto the Hurst Road. The roads themselves which were tarmac were covered in peat prior to each meeting and at Graburn Way a covering of grass cuttings was spread on top to try to replicate the grass to prevent horses trying to jump the road.

The Hurst Park Club was a private members club and when the course was first opened the Club had a club house in Hurst House (on the opposite side of Hurst Road where Kelvinbrook is now). Molesey was a rural place in the 1890s and members of the Hurst Park Club made little use of the club house other than on race days. As a result the club premises were transferred to a central London location, firstly at 83 Piccadilly and in the 1930's 5/6 Cork Street in Mayfair. Today the Cork Street building houses offices above the premises of two fine art dealers.

In common with most of society clubs the Hurst Park Club was originally for gentlemen only but by the 1930's Ladies were allowed to apply for membership on their own account. At that time membership cost £12 and that included TWO ladies badges. Clearly gentlemen could bring female companions to the races free of charge but the same didn't apply to ladies. The Club entrance fee had been suspended suggesting the Club was trying to recruit members from a larger audience than hitherto although members still had to be introduced as to their suitability for membership and the same scrutiny was also applied to members'

guests. As will be seen when we look at attendances these policies made the members' enclosure an elite place to which most couldn't aspire.

Further change came after WWII when both gentlemen and ladies could buy a single members' badge for £12 and those who wanted a transferable Ladies Badge could purchase that for an additional £6. Had Hurst Park moved into the 1970's it almost certainly would have abolished the 'voucher' system for members guests and allowed anyone who could afford it to pay a daily admission to the members enclosure as has happened at all racecourses. At the time however the arrangements at Hurst Park Club were not unique and were replicated at most other courses.

If the arrangements for the members' enclosure were outrageously sexist by today's standards, this wasn't the only area of discrimination in racing at that time.

Most of you will be familiar with the campaign of the suffragettes in seeking to obtain the vote and many will have seen the newsreel of the 1913 Derby in which Emily Wilding Davidson attempted to attach the suffragette flag to the King's horse Anmer as it approached Tattenham Corner. Anmer and his jockey Herbert Jones, were brought to the ground but were not seriously injured. Miss Davidson however, suffered severe injuries and died in Epsom Hospital a few days later (8 June).

Miss Davidson's death attracted a huge amount of publicity and it was always likely that the suffragette movement would try to capitalise on that publicity. Racing as already mentioned was a male dominated activity and being patronised by the wealthy was always a potential target. And so it proved for Hurst Park. Shortly after midnight on 9 June 1913 a passing policeman noticed that the grandstand was on fire and raised the alarm but not before considerable damage was done to the stands (picture right)



Two suffragettes Kitty Marion (35) and Clara Giveen (26) were arrested and charged with wilfully setting fire to the grandstand and other buildings on Hurst Park Racecourse and causing damage said to be £10,000. Twelve days later Marion and Giveen were committed for trial at Kingston for setting fire to the grandstand and doing damage to the extent of £7,000. The pair stood trial at Surrey Assizes at the beginning of July and were both sentenced to three years penal servitude. Marion said they had been convicted on the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence and that she would go on hunger strike and also would refuse to come out of gaol under the 'Cat and Mouse Act'. Giveen said that no sentence should be passed as they had not been tried by their peers and until women were on the jury as well as men no sentence should be passed.

Leaving aside the 'politics' of the suffragettes cause it was of considerable credit to the management of Hurst Park and the ground staff that the course was able to stage its next planned fixture on 25/26 July (only 6 weeks after the attack).



Although women over the age of 30 were granted the vote in 1918, and this was extended to those over 21 in 1928, the role of women in racing remained far from equal. In Victorian times it was not considered appropriate for women to own racehorses. There were however, some women who were both very well informed on racing and whose strong personalities enabled them to get round the ban. One of these was Caroline, Duchess of Montrose (left) who carried on her racing activities under the 'nom de course' of Mr Manton. Mr



Manton undoubtedly would have had runners at Hampton Races. Several winners at the

early Hurst Park Meetings were owned by 'Mr Jersey'. This nom de course was used by the well-known actress and close friend of the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) Lillie Langtry (above right).

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century women could at last run horses in their own names and one such was the highly eccentric Miss Dorothy Paget who had inherited a huge fortune from her father Lord Queenborough and was heavily involved in racing having many runners and winners at Hurst Park (she was also a regular at Brooklands motor racing track).

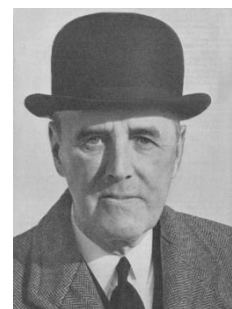
Similarly woman did train racehorses and certainly did so at Hurst Park, but you will find no reference to their achievements in the official records of racing. Although there were no words in the Rules of Racing to prevent women holding a trainers licence the Jockey Club steadfastly refused to allow them to do so. Women who had the temerity to apply for a trainers licence were politely informed that the Jockey Club "Did not consider women to be suitable persons to hold a trainers licence". As a result women trainers had to adopt the subterfuge of having their licence held by a male employee (usually their head groom). This slight was not aimed at mere upstarts but women of considerable standing and expertise. For example Miss Norah Wilmot (right) had assisted her father Sir Robert Wilmot and took over the stables at Binfield on his death. Sir Robert Wilmot was himself a member of the Jockey Club. After many years of applying for licences and being refused it took a high court case brought by Norah Wilmot and her close friend and fellow trainer Mrs Florence Nagle to overturn the Jockey Club's stance and the first women were granted licences in their own names for the first time in 1966. Miss Wilmot celebrated by saddling a winner at Brighton the day after receiving her licence. In 1972 the Jockey Club also agreed to issue licences to women rider/jockeys but, of course these changes came too late for Hurst Park.



*So who ran the races at Hurst Park?* - Day to day management of the racecourse was undertaken by three senior staff – The Managing Director, The Clerk of the Course and the Club Secretary. When Hurst Park opened Mr Joseph Davies was Secretary to the Hurst Park Syndicate, Mr R K Mainwaring was Clerk of the Course and Mr Arthur Coventry (left) was Club Secretary. Mr Davies was subsequently appointed as Managing Director a post he held until he retired in 1922.



Mr Mainwaring was replaced as Clerk of the Course in the 1890s by Mr Thomas F Dawkins. When Mr Davies retired in 1922 Mr Dawkins took on the role of both Managing Director and Clerk of the Course and he held those roles until he died in 1936. Mr Dawkins was replaced by Lt-Col John Crocker Bulteel (right) and he steered Hurst Park through the war and its post war revival. At that time John Bulteel also took on the role of Clerk of the Course at Ascot and was knighted by the Queen for his innovative and foresighted racecourse management. Lt-Col Sir John Crocker Bulteel died in 1956 and for the last six years of its existence Major Peter Martin Beckwith-Smith, whose family owned Lingfield Park, and where he had acted as Clerk of the Course since 1949, took on the roles at Hurst Park.



Arthur Coventry subsequently handed over his role as Club Secretary to his son Lt-Col C J Coventry and after World War II the position of Club Secretary was held by Mr R V Hargreaves.

This management team was supported by a ground staff. The Head Groundsman from 1919 until he died in 1942 was Harry Gill (left) who lived in Langton Road, East Molesey. Mr Gill had worked at Hurst Park since it opened in 1890 and was invited by Joseph Davis to return as soon as he was demobbed at the end of World

War II. Another member of the Gill family, Ernie Gill was maintenance plumber at the course until its closure in 1962.

This relatively small team was supplemented on racedays by Jockey Club appointees in the roles of starter, judge and clerk of the scales together with many casual employees who undertook all sorts of roles. Bill Cracknell who lived in Pemberton Road was the starter's assistant and was a familiar figure on nearly all of the racecourses in the South of England.

The Stewards of the Meeting who were (and still are) unpaid were responsible for ensuring that the Rules of Racing were complied with and had the ability to fine those who transgressed or in more serious cases to refer them to the Jockey Club or National Hunt Committee.

That brings us to medical and veterinary services. During its 72 years existence only three doctors were named on Hurst Park Racecards. Initially this was Dr James Jenkinson Knox who was Medical Officer of Health for Molesey and also instrumental in founding Molesey Football Club. James Knox died on Christmas Day 1899 and was replaced as both Medical Officer of Health and racecourse doctor by his brother Dr John E Knox (left). When Dr Knox retired his place was taken by Dr John W M Humble who remained the racecourse's senior doctor until 1962. Although the Jockey Club's then requirements for medical services were not as stringent as they are today, two doctors were required to be present for jump racing and Dr Humble was supported by other doctors from his practices' including Dr Tom Bowling, Dr Percy Rodger, Dr John Munro and Dr Kenneth Browne.



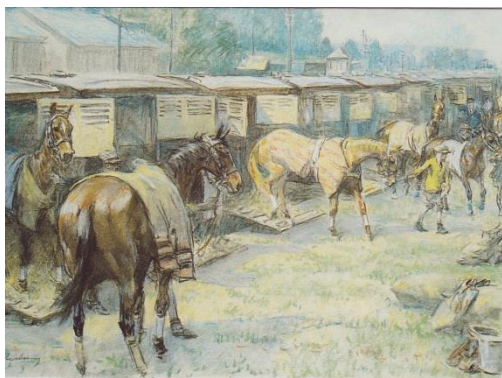
Veterinary services were initially provided by a Mr J Coleman then a Mr W E Talbot and from the 1930s by the partnership of Messrs Major S H Slocock and Mr J A Morris. By 1946 Maj. Slocock had risen to the rank of Brigadier but was still officiating as veterinary officer. During the 1950 and until 1962 Mr J A Morris was joined by Mr A G Limont. I can remember Mr Limont riding to the races on his horse.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth (subsequently the Queen Mother) was introduced to National Hunt Racing after WWII by Lord Mildmay and his trainer Peter Cazalet. Queen Elizabeth, with her daughters Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, was a regular visitor to Hurst Park and she continued to run horses under National Hunt Rules until her death in 2002. Queen Elizabeth and Princess Elizabeth jointly owned Monaveen, of whom more later, and Princess Elizabeth, who had her first winner on the flat with Astrakhan in April 1950, continued when she became Queen to concentrate on flat racing leaving her mother to follow the jumpers.

Many of you will no doubt remember seeing the Queen, Princess Margaret and the Queen Mother at Hurst Park, but there has been on-going royal involvement in both Hampton Races and also at Hurst Park throughout its history. Queen Victoria endowed a Queen's Plate at the old Hampton Racecourse and King Edward VII attended both as Prince of Wales and King. Although their interest in racing was somewhat less than Edward VII and the present Queen, both George V and George VI enjoyed success with their horses at Hurst Park.

The area to the south of Hurst Road where Kelvinbrook, Monaveen Gardens etc. is now was the racecourse public car park and in later years many racegoers would have arrived at the course by car. In the early days the wealthy would have come by horse drawn carriage and facilities for watering and feeding horses would have been provided. However, for much of the time the general public would have arrived by train to Hampton Court where additional gates opened on racedays provided a speedy exit. Special buses ran from Hampton Court to the course at a cost of 1/- each way at a time when the standard bus fare from Hampton Court to West Molesey Church (there were no regular services along Hurst Road in those days) was 3d. For the better off taxis would also have been available at Hampton Court. The alternative was to walk from Hampton Court either along the tow path or Hurst Road. A distance of just over one mile.

On Whit Monday (Hurst Park's busiest day) there were special excursion buses from central London and coaches from other surrounding areas. The ferry from Hampton was another means of access for those living north of the river.



It was not just racegoers who came by train. Until the advent of motorised horse boxes, horses would either be walked to the course from their training stables or travel by special train. The transport of horses by train was a complex logistical operation and was big business for the railways. The picture left is titled "unloading racehorses at Hampton Court" by Gilbert Holiday c 1930s.

Contemporary records of racing at Hampton talk of huge attendances but it is only with the introduction of the Tote in 1929 that detailed records of attendance were maintained.

You can analyse statistics in all sorts of ways but the table below highlights a few key figures ably demonstrating the popularity of racing at Hurst Park and in particular the Whitsun Bank Holiday Meeting.

454 days racing over 29 seasons (no racing 1941-1945)		
	Total Attendance	4,224,985
	Average daily attendance	9,306
Whit-Monday meeting most popular day		
	Record attendance - 1951	42,774
	Average	29,914
	Record attendance – Easter Monday 1946 (meeting transferred from Kempton Park)	49,600

Source: Records of attendance were maintained by the Tote from 1929 – 1962.

I have referred previously to the class system. The table below shows for each enclosure the admission prices that were in place in Hurst Park in 1962 (equivalent in decimal coinage shown in brackets) and the average attendances 1929-62 in each enclosure. The percentages demonstrate the exclusive nature of the Club (only 6% of the average attendance) whilst just over 40% of racegoers were in the centre course enclosure with limited facilities and the poorest view of the racing but most likely the best many could afford in relation to average wages at that time.

Enclosure	Admission price 1962	Average attendance	% of Total
Club	Day badge: Gent 45/- (£2.25) Lady 35/- (£1.75)	578	6%
Tattersalls	25/- (£1.25)	1,634	20%
Silver Ring	10/- (50p)	2,527	26%
New (opened 1955)	7/6 (37½p)	437	7%
Centre course	4/- (20p)	4,130	41%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9,306</b>	<b>100%</b>

Weather plays a big part in influencing attendance and sometimes results (mostly in winter) in meetings being abandoned. In the period 1929-1962 33 days racing were abandoned mainly due to adverse weather/flooding/frost/snow and fog. Strangely few meetings were called off for waterlogging because once the flooding subsides the ground is quickly



becomes race-able again. Meetings were also lost because of the general election in 1951, the death of King George VI (1952), and the outbreak of war in 1939.

One unusual aspect was the decision by the Hurst Park executive to open the New Enclosure (a small enclosure alongside Hurst Road) in 1955. By the end of the 1960s many racecourses were closing their course enclosures and amalgamating the Silver Ring and Tattersall's enclosure as racegoers voted with their feet to go in the better enclosures or not bother at all. Today most racecourses operate with a two or single enclosure model. These changes have been driven by public expectations as much as financial considerations.

### **Impact on the local community**

It is difficult to measure the impact on the local community. When the new enclosed Hurst Park was opened the local residents were inevitably concerned about the fence which completely surrounded the course which was not that attractive, the loss of use of the Hurst for recreation and the diverting of public rights of way.

In time it seems that the locals got used to living with the facility and when it came to closure there were objections to the loss of the amenity and its replacement by housing.

When Hurst Park operated there was little development on Hurst Road and even when some housing grew up nearer to Hampton Court and also on the former golf course there were no public amenities. It seems unlikely that traders in East and West Molesey derived much benefit from raceday crowds as racegoers didn't arrive through the village. Some local tradesmen may have provided services to the course and some residents would have gained employment as race day casuals. The public houses and shops in the Bridge Road are close to Hampton Court station and would have almost certainly gained considerable trade.

The large crowds particularly on Whit Monday would have overwhelmed Hurst Road and the Thames towpath as racegoers arrived and left the course. Such a large crowd inevitably brought problems with itinerant traders and three card tricksters plying their illegal trade in the areas outside the course. East Molesey Cricket Club wrote to both the Police and Esher Urban District Council about the behaviour of racegoers and in particular on an occasion when in order to get a quick exit they climbed the fence to take a short cut across the cricket ground.

In terms of racing two races stand out.

**The Victoria Cup** is Hurst Park's most enduring race. First run in 1901 to commemorate the reign of Queen Victoria, it was run annually (apart from the war years) until 1962. The race was then transferred to Ascot where it is still run today.

One of the innovations that John Crocker Bulteel was responsible for was the introduction in 1939 of the **Triumph Hurdle** which was intended to be a Championship for Four Year Old Hurdlers. Because of the War the race wasn't run again until 1950 but since the closure of Hurst Park the Triumph Hurdle has been transferred to Cheltenham where it has full championship status forming the curtain raiser to Cheltenham Gold Cup day at the jump racing festival each March. The picture right shows a youthful Lester Piggott winning the Triumph Hurdle on Prince Charlemagne in 1954



Despite its relatively short life you must not get the impression that Hurst Park was not a success from a racing perspective. It offered good quality racing on a course that was considered very fair. As a result all the leading jockeys rode there and the races were attended by racing society. Equally a glance at racecards shows that nearly all the leading owners of the day had runners there. To talk about all the personalities who were involved

would be a whole talk in itself but just to give a flavour I mention; Sir Winston Churchill, the Aga Khan, His Highness the Maharaja or Rajpipla, The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Lords of Carnarvon and Horatio Bottomley.

I cannot leave racing at Hurst Park without mentioning Monaveen, after whom Monaveen Gardens is named. Monaveen, as I mentioned above, was the first horse owned by Queen Elizabeth and she owned it jointly with her daughter Princess Elizabeth in whose colours he ran. Monaveen won twice at Hurst Park including the Queen Elizabeth Steeplechase in 1949. Sadly Monaveen was destroyed after a bad fall at Hurst Park in 1950 and he was buried in the racecourse stables. Monaveen was remembered in a special painting which was reproduced as the front cover of the Hurst Park racecard for Whit-Monday 1953.

And, so we come to the final days racing – Thursday, 10 October 1962 the final race of the afternoon – the Byfleet Stakes was won by Anassa ridden by Des Cullen. The picture right shows the view racegoers in the stands would have had of that race i.e. head on. The weather is a typical October raceday with a weak sun producing a low mist as the light starts to fade. The attendance for that final day was 5,919.



### **Why did Hurst Park close?**

Racecourses have never been a money making machine and many have gone to the wall as I mentioned at the beginning. Hurst Park wasn't noticeably unsuccessful but with attendance steadily declining, a trend which everyone expected to continue, indeed even accelerate with the introduction of betting shops. The newly created Horse Race Betting Levy Board formed to manage and distribute the levy raised from off course betting was also thought to have an agenda to streamline racing and a number of racecourses did subsequently close during the 1960s due to the withdrawal of Levy Board funding.

With the benefit of hindsight the identification of alternative funding streams from non-raceday uses things might have been different, although compared to others the Hurst Park site, hemmed in by the river and Hurst Road, had very little surplus land from which to generate capital for upgrading of the facilities.

Although the Chairman of the Hurst Park Syndicate, Sir George Dundas, was against the sale, he lost the day. In simple terms the offer from Wates was just too good to refuse.

### **Hurst Park lives on!!**

Given a further ten to twenty years new management styles, alternative uses might have made the economics and future of Hurst Park as a racecourse. But all has not been lost the gates at Graburn Way stand as a fitting memorial. Monaveen is remembered in Monaveen Gardens, as is racecourse chairman Sir George Dundas (Dundas Gardens) although I am still uncertain about the reason for Cherimoya Gardens) as the racehorse Cherimoya (winner of The Oaks at Epsom in 1911) never ran at Hurst Park!

A keen eye will also identify a few remnants of the perimeter fence still standing around the cricket ground and on Hurst Meadow. The name of Hurst Park is retained in the name of the Primary School where the stables once stood.

After the last meeting an auction was held at the racecourse and one of the Grandstands was sold to Mansfield Town Football Club. The turf went to Ascot for their new jump racing course which opened in 1965 and the Triumph Hurdle and Victoria Cup are both still run along with the Henry VIII Novices Chase which went to Sandown Park.

Unfortunately not all the initial development stood the test of time. The Paddock public house, thought to be an essential for the new community in an area previously devoid of such facilities became a victim of the downturn in the licensed trade and was replaced by Tesco, but at least that store proudly proclaims Hurst Park on the side of the building.