

The Bramham Moor Hunt [1]

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Notes on the early history to 1898 as told by William Scarth Dixon in ' The History of the Bramham Moor Hunt ' published in 200 copies by Richard Jackson , Leeds , 1898.

The book describes the areas hunted ; many individual days ' hunting from contemporary diaries ; all sorts of comments on the arts and actualities of hunting ; and pen [and some pictorial] portraits of principal masters , huntsmen and hounds

The Season & The Area

The season began around the beginning of November , preceded by cub hunting , and ended during April , the actual dates varying according to weather .

Meets took place on :

Mondays [around the areas of Stockeld , Harewood , Kirby Overblow , Almscliff , Weeton & Huby] ;

Fridays [Thorp Arch , Walton , Marston , Tockwith , Deighton Bar , Walshford

Wednesdays & Saturdays [varying over the rest of the area , but down to Hambleton , Birkin & Thorpe Willoughby ; across to Otley ; and up as far as Beckwithshaw & Blubberhouses].

In all , the area initially hunted by the BMH was described as " From Skipton in Craven to Selby , and right up to the walls of York " , though , after its foundation, the York & Ainsty Hunt took over the area east of the Tadcaster road beyond the Wild Man. Furthermore , during the C19 industrial and population growth increasingly limited the Hunt 's western area.

Early History

Hare and stag hunting preceded fox hunting as a gentleman 's sport in Britain , though the latter became prominent during the Queen Anne period . It was then , the early 1700 's , that the BMH was founded , led during the C18 by the Lane Fox , Vavasour and Gascoigne families.

Owing to the friendship between James Lane Fox , a great breeder of hounds , and Hugo Meynell , the ' Meynell System ' of breeding and kennel management , introduced at the Leicestershire Quorn Hunt , was adopted at

Betting became prevalent in the early C19 , with matches between sets of riders and hounds , competing to be first to run down a fox over set ground .

After the death of James Lane Fox , the BMH became centred on Harewood for a period , when the second Earl of Harewood became Master. At this time the Lane Fox family had run into financial difficulties owing to the extravagance of James ' s son " Gambler " George , who, " a very heavy man , hunted as a matter of course , but did not care much for hounds , preferring Newmarket and racing to hound - breeding. " Before his death , however , James did ensure that the pack remained at Bramham.

1848 saw the mastership return to Bramham , when the ascendancy of "Squire " George Lane Fox ushered in a golden 50 years in the Hunt 's history.

After much inter - breeding among the hounds in the Harewood period had weakened the stock , it was necessary to return to improved breeding methods . This was overseen by Charles Treadwell , who was Huntsman with the BMH for 23 years until his death , aged 62 , in 1865. The Bramham Moor kennel books date back to his time , to 1841.

It was in the 1852 / 3 season that the BMH became a ' subscription pack ' , with George Lane Fox and Lord Harewood paying £500 each , Sir John Ramsden £100 , 16 members at £50 , 2 at £30 , 12 at £25 , 13 at £10 , and 2 paying only 5 guineas [Scarth Dixon lists all the names].

At various times through the book , injuries to riders are described , the most notable being when Lord Harewood was killed in a fall during a meet at Stockeld in 1857. Another interesting accident occurred in February 1882 , this time to the hounds , who were run down by a passing express train , with six killed on the spot.

Charles Treadwell was followed by four Huntsmen in fairly swift succession --- Goodall [whose methods didn 't suit] , Turpin [killed in a fall when returning from York] , Goddard Morgan and George Kingsbury --- before the advent of the next man of considerable stature , Tom Smith , who began his tenure in 1877 .

Each season 's hunting was recorded in brief in " Squire " George 's diary ; typically , for season 1874 /5 : " Hounds were out 114 days , killed 58 brace of foxes and ran 28 brace to ground . Frost kept them in the kennels 29 days. " It is interesting to note that " Squire " George, a man noted for his extensive knowledge of and real interest in his hounds , should report , not in respect of riders but in relation to the hounds and the foxes.

This genuine enthusiasm and expertise was recognised by his fellows , hence their presentation on 23 November 1872 of a Testimonial to " Squire " George , with Lord Harewood doing the honours. Scarth Dixon includes the full text of presenter 's and recipient 's speeches . The Squire 's finishing words could almost be taken as a family motto :

" This splendid Testimonial , of which I am so proud , will be handed down to my children ' s children , and will be the means of reminding them that it is part of their duty in this life to be friendly towards their neighbours , to preserve foxes , and to love Yorkshire. "

Towards the end of the book , after the detailed dairy descriptions of days hunting , are a chapter with pen portraits of " Squire " George , of various Huntsmen and supporters --- and of the most successful hounds. This is followed by a chapter on the rearing ang training of puppies.

The book ends appropriately with the death on 2 November 1896 , after several bouts of 'flu , of " Squire " George . His funeral , to which one foot hunter walked in pouring rain from Leeds , clearly became the man :

" The crowds of mourners of every class who filled the pretty little church at Bramham on that dreary and wet November morning ... speak more eloquently than any words can do ... Never perhaps was there such a representative body of all that was best in English sport assembled. From the Prince of Wales down to the humble follower of hounds on foot , every class was represented. "

This was indeed a splendid run, much of it over a fine grass country, and as wild as man need wish to ride over. The season ended on April 5th, at Bramham Park, where they had a fair day's sport, killing one fox and running another to ground.

The year 1856 was remarkable for a very interesting presentation which took place, the history of which is unique. Farming in the early fifties was very prosperous; and Mr. Fox's tenants approached him on the subject of their rents, which they said were too low, and which they were willing should be raised. Mr. Fox, of course, could not consent to such a course; and they then commissioned Sir Francis Grant to paint his portrait, which they presented to Mrs. Fox. The horse is Courtier,—the horse he rode through the famous run already related. He was a remarkably high-couraged horse, such as many would not care to ride, and was a purchase from the late Newcombe Mason. The hound is General, by Streamer—Belvoir Guilty. The inscription at the foot of the portrait runs as follows:—
'This portrait of GEORGE LANE FOX, Esq., was presented to Mrs. Lane Fox by the tenantry on the Bramham Park estate, as a memorial of their landlord's liberality.'

1856-57. The earliest record of the season is an entry relating to October 27th: but they would probably start cub-hunting earlier than that. The season was like its predecessor, a very good one, and excellent runs seemed to be the rule, and not the exception. Yet the season is a black one in the annals of the Hunt, for it was during it that that good sportsman, the third Earl of Harewood, met with the accident which resulted in his death.

The entry which follows is an interesting one:—

'December 12th. Bickerton Bar. Unluckily for me, I was obliged to go to Oxford. Hounds found at Ingmanthorpe, ran a ring, then away to Walshford Bridge, Ribston,

Farmers' Present

'through the plantation, leaving Birk Crag to the right, and carried him on about three miles, pointing for the Nidd. A good run, but getting late, and our horses not *anxious* to go on, we stopped. One hour and a half to Walton Head, one hour to Birk Crag. Very good and severe day.'

On the 10th, they met at Cross Roads, Bramham, and what they did that day is not likely to be forgotten by those who were out. There was not much scent, and as usual under those circumstances, the fox hung about, and they hunted him into Bramham village. He looked in at the door of Miss Ledgard's house, and some hounds went in and jumped through the drawing-room window. The sport on the 15th is worthy of record for the curious circumstance which took place:—

'Boot and Shoe. Killed a lame fox from the small wood near Newfield. Found near the Boot and Shoe, and lost. Found in Micklefield Wood, and ran a ring round the woods, then away by Led Mill to Bullen Wood, turned away from Heyton Wood, and killed a few fields below Jackdaw Crag. One hour, five minutes. A most curious occurrence, whilst the hounds were running into their fox, a fresh one jumped up, and was killed at the same moment.'

Very severe was the frost which set in two days later, and on Christmas-day the thermometer was nine degrees below zero. Sport was good when they got to work again, but February was rather a broken month. March, however, did well, and it opened with a glorious day's sport:—

'March 1st. Tadcaster Bar. Found and killed in Catterton Wood. Found in Shire Oaks; went away very fast towards Wighill, back towards Catterton, turned to the left to Healaugh village, came to a check at the gravel pits; very fast, twenty-five minutes. Hunted slowly on towards Wighill, turned to the left to Healaugh House,

Typical events
days' hunting
including a hit
Bramham village

guished were much improved by the practice he got in driving coaches from a very early age. Mr. Fox, it must be remembered, was the connecting link, if I may be allowed to use such a term, between the old and the new methods of quick travelling. Gentlemen of a preceding generation travelled in their own carriages drawn by post-horses, and it was not till 1786, a little above a hundred years ago, that the real glories of the road began. In a few years the improvement in public conveyances was so great, and the service was so much better, that they became generally used by all classes, but it was not till Macadam had rendered himself immortal by his new system of road-making, that the words of Nimrod, 'Coach travelling is no longer a disgusting and tedious labour, but has long since been converted into comparative ease, and really approaches to something like luxury,' could be said to apply literally.

Mr. Fox's first experience of a stage coach has been told before, I believe, but the story is such a good one, and is, moreover, so typical of the change which was rapidly coming over the country with the development of the coaching system, that it must be given once more, and in the squire's own words: 'I was shivering under the archway at Wetherby, when ten years old,' he writes, 'my father having sent me to meet the Glasgow mail, just put on the line from Doncaster, running via Pontefract, Aberford, Wetherby, &c. "Coachey" was at breakfast. My father's servant was ordered to book me an inside place to London on my way to Eton, and to give the guard a guinea to look after me. A stout fellow with red face came up, and said, "Are you young Fox?" "Yes." "Why, you've booked inside!" "a gentleman rides upon t'box; come wi' mea!" He went to the office, and said, "This young gentleman has made a

'two). He handed the two guineas to me and said, "There, "spend that when you get to school." Dear old Jack! I did not forget him. My father was told that I had been seen on the box of the mail, talking to the coachman. He wrote me, regretting that I should have to travel by a public conveyance, but to sit cheek by jowl with the coachman was the vulgarest thing I could do, and desired me not to do it again. My father could only travel with four post-horses in a chariot by Barker. How sudden the change was! Old Jack let me "take hold" of quiet teams as soon as I was strong enough, and I did love the old Glasgow mail. Several times I have driven her from Alconbury Hill to the Cross Roads, Clifford Moor,—one hundred and forty-five miles.'

Within a very few years coaching became a chosen and favourite occupation with gentlemen, and Sir St. Vincent Cotton, the Duke of Beaufort, Mr. Foljambe, Sir Charles Ibbotson, and others too numerous to mention here, used frequently to drive the public coaches, and great coachmen as the gentlemen I have mentioned undoubtedly were, none of them were superior to or keener than Mr. Fox. Indeed, it was with him fox-hunting first, and coaching next. As he truly said, 'The love of driving is born in some people, but there are plenty who cannot learn;' and curiously enough he seems to have been the only enthusiastic coachman in the family, and he remarks himself that he does not know one of his relatives who cared for driving.

It is to this love of driving which is born in some people that the modern revival of coaching is to be attributed, and though Mr. Fox did not take a very active part in it, his interest was keen, and he had every sympathy with it, and he had one or two journeys on the coaches which ran out of London during recent years, notably the Tunbridge

pack. Difficulties with them only existed to be overcome, and now that they have all gone,—he, the head, the last of all,—the pack remains, as a fitting memento of what can be done by energy, skill, and the true sportsman's spirit.

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The History of the Bramham Hunt is to a certain extent the Life of Mr. Fox. Whatever he did, he did thoroughly, and his whole energies were devoted to the promotion of the sport he loved so well, and of which he was so distinguished an ornament. Any eulogy would be superfluous. From the extracts from his diary and letters which I have given, those who knew him can learn more about him than from whole pages of eulogy, and those who had not the privilege of his acquaintance may learn in some measure what manner of man he was from the same source.

How he was beloved and respected it is needless to tell. The crowds of mourners of every class who filled the pretty little church at Bramham on that dreary and wet November morning when he was laid to rest, speak more eloquently than any words can do on that point. Never perhaps was there such a representative body of all that was best in English sport assembled. From the Prince of Wales down to the humble follower of hounds on foot, every class was represented.*

What better epitaph could a man have than a funeral such as this?

* One foot hunter walked all the way from Leeds in the pouring rain to pay the last tribute of respect to the typical English gentleman who for eighty years had lived amongst his own people.

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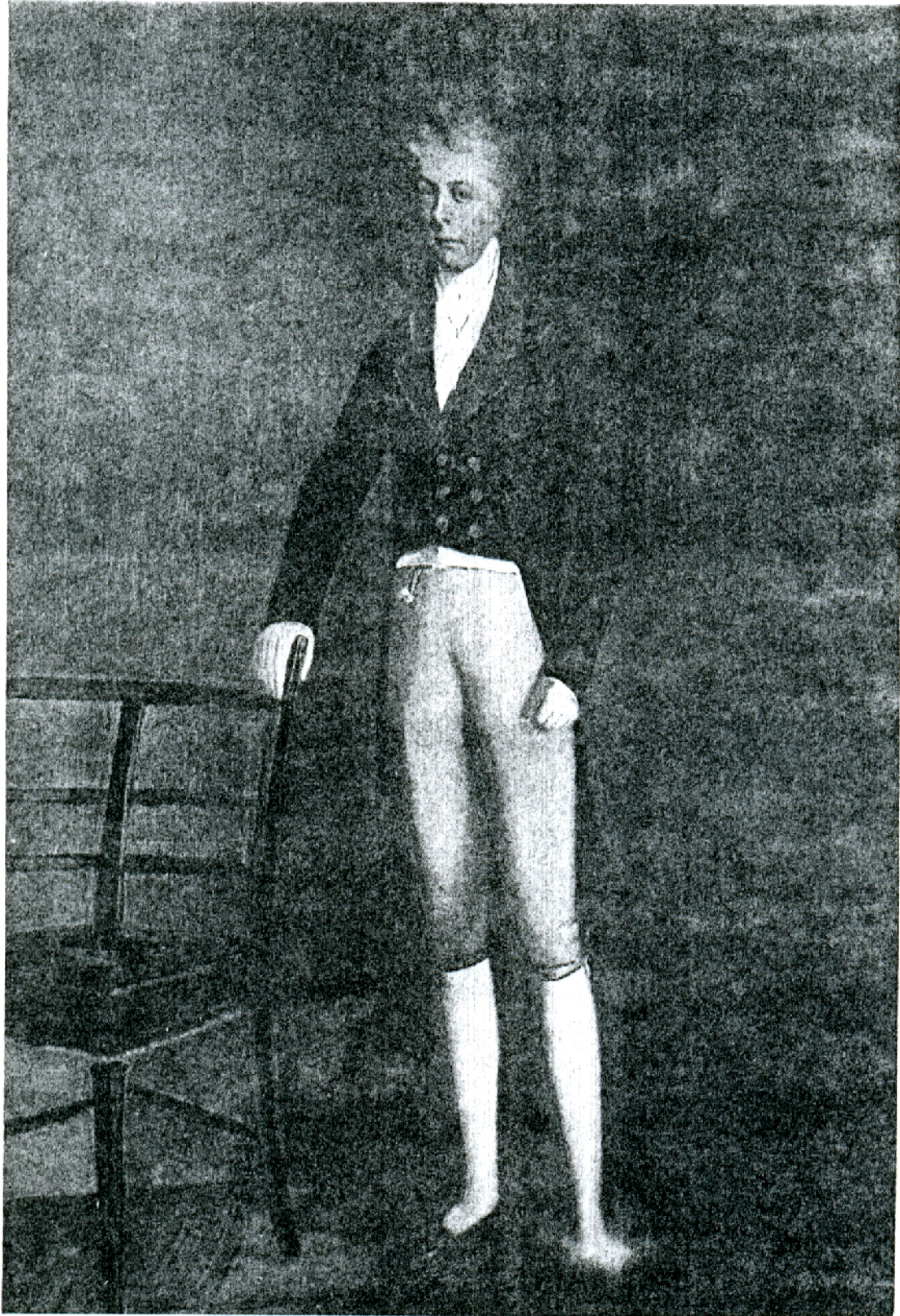
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FINIS.











Boxing Day Fleet in the Village Square
1971



Hope Hall, Men, as now, home of the Hunt pack.

