

## THE HISTORY OF PARK HOUSE STABLES, KINGSCLERE

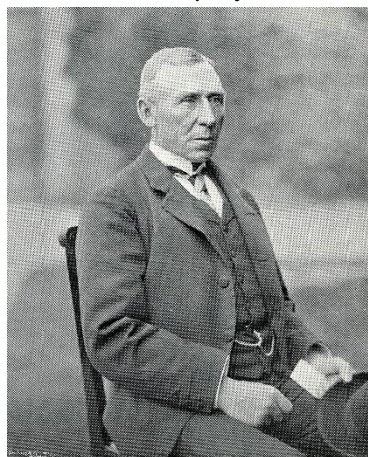
*By Cornelius Lysaght*

### A Touch of Genius

1865-1905

With a position adjacent to downland turf which has benefitted the training of racehorses for centuries, Kingsclere is a natural location for stables to be developed in the mid-1800s; the trainer appointed is to become one of flat racing's greatest names and he ensures the big-race winners soon flow.

Given the large scale of the estate, Kingsclere's history has often been the story of wealthy individuals as well as trainers. The first of these was Sir Joseph Hawley, a colourful figure of the Victorian age, who kept strict control of operations, particularly of where horses were to race, and employed trainers largely as glorified stud grooms. Having run a number of



John Porter

successful stables in Italy as well as in Britain, most recently in converted farm buildings at nearby Cannon Heath with a young John Porter as private trainer, Hawley, the 'Lucky Baronet', built a new yard at Kingsclere in 1867. The trainer's status was reflected by the cramped cottage allocated to him as lodgings but in Porter, however, Hawley had found someone with a touch of genius about him, and within two seasons Kingsclere produced its first Derby winner when Blue Gown was successful at Epsom in 1868. The colt proceeded to win the Gold Cup at Royal Ascot in the same year, and became the first of a tradition of top class horses housed at Kingsclere that continues to this day.

When in 1880 Hawley died, it emerged that he had written a clause into his will allowing Porter to purchase the estate for £4,000, half of what it had originally cost. The ambitious trainer, who was rapidly becoming one of the most successful of the day, soon exercised the option and set about transforming the yard into what was considered a state-of-the-art establishment of the time. In his autobiography he described the process: "I was very anxious that the architect should embody in his designs the ideas I had formed regarding the requirements of a racing stable; so when I was convalescent [after being struck down with typhoid] I obtained a drawing board, T-square, pencil and paper and set to work to prepare some plans." He did an excellent job. Nearly a century and a half later the old yard works as well as ever: its lasting beauty is that it is utterly functional, with spacious airy boxes, excellent drainage and no slippery surfaces. Such is the air of permanence and solidity about the place that there is no reason to believe that it will not still be working perfectly in another one hundred years. In addition to the yard, Porter laid out the superb gallops on Watership Down, including the famous 'Derby gallop', a winding valley-gallop cutting through the undulations of the Downs, most of which remain in use today and in only slightly altered form.



The Yard

From the newly-developed Kingsclere, Porter's stream of big-race winners kept on. The wonderful stayer Isonomy won eight major prizes between 1878 and 1880, including Royal Ascot's Gold (now Queen's) Vase and the Gold Cup twice; he was also successful in the Doncaster and Goodwood Cups and landed a colossal betting coup for his owner Frederick Gretton in the Cambridgeshire Handicap at Newmarket in 1878. In 1882 Porter had charge of two fillies, Geheimniss and Shotover, both of which were leading fancies for the Oaks at Epsom, but rather than run them against each other, it was decided to pitch Shotover against the colts in the Derby. It was a brave call, but one that paid off handsomely when she won the great race, and her stablemate then made it a famous Epsom Classic double in the Oaks three days later. The grateful owners of the pair sponsored a day of festivities and celebrations on the Downs for all villagers. Kingsclere enjoyed more Derby success the following year when St Blaise triumphed at Epsom, but, during a lucrative decade for the operation, his achievement pales into insignificance compared with those of the unbeaten Ormonde.





Ormonde

Ormonde was something of a late developer in 1885 and was fortunate in many ways to be trained by someone as patient as John Porter. Given plenty of time to mature, the colt did not make the racecourse until the autumn, but quickly demonstrated his talents when running away with the Dewhurst Stakes, then as now one of the leading races for two-year-olds. As a three-year-old Ormonde, ridden by Fred Archer, the champion jockey thirteen

times in a row in the 1870s and 1880s, was in a league of his own; they recorded success in the 2,000 Guineas at Newmarket, the Derby and then Doncaster's St Leger, a Classic-race treble that makes the colt one of just fifteen winners of flat racing's 'Triple Crown' since the concept was hatched in 1809. Newmarket's July Cup and Champion Stakes (now staged at Ascot) were amongst other highlights in a career that exhibited remarkable versatility in terms of race-distance from sprints upwards.

The facilities that had served Porter so well with Ormonde continued to pay dividends as Sainfoin was prepared to win the Derby in 1890. The following year, Common was sent out to also complete the Triple Crown before, twelve months later, a first 'Fillies' Triple Crown – when the 2000 Guineas and Derby are replaced with the fillies-only Classics, the 1000 Guineas and Oaks – was won for Kingsclere by La Fleche. A remarkable performer by any standards, she also landed the Cambridgeshire Handicap and Glorious Goodwood's Nassau Stakes in the same season. At same time, Porter also trained the leading colt Orme (a son of Ormonde), and while there was no Classic success – there was dark talk of 'nobbling' ahead of the Derby – he did still have a lucrative three-year-old season, winning the Eclipse Stakes at Sandown, the Sussex Stakes at Goodwood and the Champion Stakes.

In 1899, Orme's son, Flying Fox, emulated his grand-sire Ormonde and Common by becoming Porter's third winner of the Triple Crown. In 1900, La Roche won the Oaks for the stable and, although this was not his final top-level win before retirement in 1905, it was his twenty-third and final Classic victory in what is generally recognised as being amongst the most remarkable careers of his or of any generation. Despite all the success, his thoughts in retirement



Horses on the Downs

reveal that it was not all plain sailing. He wrote: "Experience has proved to me that the emoluments I received as a trainer merely provided sufficient to live upon. There was no surplus to put in the bank. Any money I have saved has come to me in the form of presents from my patrons and as a result of fortunate speculations in bloodstock." John Porter died in 1922 aged 83.

## Waugh and Peace

1905 – 1964

Backed by some of racing's highest profile and most successful owner/breeders, a new trainer takes over the helm at Kingsclere and immediately brings further Classic success; after the War, the sale of the stables ultimately leads to the arrival of the Balding family.

Even before John Porter's retirement the estate was costing so much to maintain that it had been re-constituted as 'Kingsclere Ltd', with funding provided by a well-heeled syndicate including the Duke of Portland and the Duke of Westminster. For the 1906 season, they recruited William Waugh, who had been successful in the 1000 Guineas of 1898 with Nun Nicer from stables built by Fred Archer in Newmarket. Waugh remained at Kingsclere until 1924, and oversaw further Classic success straightaway, providing Westminster with a win in the 1906 St Leger with Troutbeck, who had been third in the Derby. The 1000 Guineas of 1910 was part of a profitable season for the filly Winkipop, also a winner at Royal Ascot, at Glorious Goodwood and at York's Ebor meeting for owner/breeder Waldorf Astor, himself a politician and husband of Lady (Nancy) Astor, Britain's first female MP. Clarissimus won the 2,000 Guineas on his seasonal debut in 1916 and went on to success in the Champion Stakes.

The years 1924 to 1934 were a fallow period for the stables, but when training resumed it was under the control of Fred Butters, younger brother of the Aga Khan's trainer Frank Butters, who added to the Kingsclere roll of honour when Mid-day Sun finished late and fast to grab Derby glory in 1937. Two years later war broke out and Kingsclere's gallops were silent once more. During wartime, American soldiers were stationed in Park House and in the stables, but following the end of hostilities the former jump jockey Evan Williams took out a licence to train at Kingsclere.

Williams, one of four jockeys to ride steeplechasing star Golden Miller during his five-year dominance of the Cheltenham Gold Cup in the 1930s, had previously been secretary to trainer Ivor Anthony at Barcelona House stables in what was then an extensive training centre in the village of Wroughton, on the Marlborough Downs in Wiltshire. The stables had been made famous by Aubrey Hastings, the winner of four Grand Nationals, three at Aintree (once also as jockey, with Ascetic's Silver in 1906) and one staged at Gatwick during the Great War in 1917 – the area on which Gatwick's stands, paddock and home bend once stood is now covered by the South Terminal of London's second airport.



Aubrey Hastings

After Hastings' sudden death in 1929, his widow Winifred continued to run the yard though it was not until years later, in 1966, that the Rules of Racing permitted women to officially hold training licences – and only after a court ruling which the historic regulator, The Jockey Club, fought hard against – so Ivor Anthony was nominally in charge. For six years, Peter Hastings, son of Aubrey and Winifred, was assistant at Wroughton before purchasing Kingsclere and starting up training in 1953, as it turned out exactly fifty years before his grandson Andrew Balding was to take over the operation. Peter Hastings, who changed his surname by deed poll to Hastings-Bass in 1954, sent out the winners of 340 races, including those of three of flat racing's great handicaps, the Royal Hunt Cup at Royal Ascot, the Stewards' Cup at Glorious Goodwood and the Cambridgeshire at Newmarket, before his untimely death aged 43 in 1964. The licence then passed on to his assistant Ian Balding, who was to marry his late employer's daughter Emma in 1969.

### The Gallops of Champions

1964 – 2003

A new era in the stables' history is heralded by the arrival of Mill Reef whose iconic exploits bring a string of Europe's major flat racing prizes to Kingsclere; but it is not just Classics, as 'sprint Queen' Lochsong speeds to folk hero status.

During 39-years of further horseracing excellence while in charge at Kingsclere, Ian Balding sent out more than 2,000 winners, including 123 in Group-level races. Of these, the most famous and influential was Mill Reef, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's true flat racing greats. Owned by the American philanthropist and long-term supporter of the Kingsclere operation Paul Mellon, Mill Reef was an exceptional two-year-old in 1970, winning the Coventry Stakes at Royal Ascot by eight lengths, York's Gimcrack Stakes by ten lengths and the Dewhurst Stakes by four lengths before being named Champion Two-Year-Old. Aged three, Mill Reef split Brigadier Gerard and My Swallow in what was one of the finest stagings of the 2,000 Guineas, before securing his own place in turf history with victories in the Derby, the Eclipse Stakes, the King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes at Ascot and in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in Paris. He was deservedly named Champion Racehorse of 1971, and Ian won the trainers' championship in the same year.



Mill Reef



Mill Reef raced on as a four-year-old but was plagued by virus and injury; despite that he still won two more Group One-race prizes, including the Prix Ganay by ten lengths, before disaster struck when he fractured his near (left) front-leg on the gallops. A ten-hour, pioneering operation to insert screws into the leg, performed in the apprentice jockeys' gym at the stables, saved his life and enabled him to retire as a stallion at The National Stud in Newmarket, where he became a hugely significant sire.



A makeshift operating theatre

Mill Reef, however, was only the first in a long line of outstanding talent to be prepared from Park House Stables, Kingsclere during Ian's tenure. In 1979, another top two-year-old emerged in the form of Mrs Penny, winner of the Cherry Hinton Stakes at Newmarket, the Lowther Stakes at York and Newmarket's Cheveley Park Stakes. As a three-year-old she was placed in the UK's and the Irish 1,000 Guineas before success in the French Oaks at Chantilly and the Prix Vermeille at Longchamp and running the top-class colt Ela-Mana-Mou to just a length in the pulsating finish to that year's King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes.



Mrs Penny

In 1982 Ian recorded the first of two consecutive wins in France's prestigious Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud, both of which came with sons of Mill Reef owned and bred by Paul Mellon. Glint Of Gold won in 1982, with Diamond Shoal following suit twelve months later. In 1986 another top filly came along in the diminutive form of Forest Flower, another to race in the distinctive black and gold Mellon silks. She won the Queen Mary at Royal Ascot, the Cherry Hinton and, appropriately, the Mill Reef Stakes at Newbury before being controversially disqualified from

first place in the Cheveley Park Stakes when adjudged to have impeded an opponent during the race, even though the incident was widely regarded as not to have affected the result. The following year she recorded another Classic success for Kingsclere in the Irish 1,000 Guineas.

More Group One-level success came in 1989 when the Jeff Smith-owned and bred Dashing Blade won the Dewhurst. That same year Silver Fling captured the Prix de l'Abbaye at Longchamp for owner/breeder George Strawbridge, but it was another Kingsclere sprinter Lochsong, again owned by Jeff Smith and bred at his Littleton Stud that was soon to capture the public's imagination. Slow to reveal her talent, Lochsong blossomed as a four-year-old in the summer/early autumn of 1992, notably in what is informally known as the 'Sprint

Handicapping Triple Crown', the Stewards' Cup, the Portland Handicap at Doncaster and in Scotland's Ayr Gold Cup, the first time all three of these historic – and very hard to win – trophies had been won by the same horse in the same season. A year later, she stepped up again, running away with the Group One Nunthorpe Stakes at



Lochsong

York – after which her rider Frankie Dettori offered the never-to-be-forgotten analysis that she was “like [gold medal-winning Olympic athlete] Linford Christie without the lunchbox” – before she recorded a simply startling four-length victory in the Prix de l'Abbaye. She was crowned 1993's Champion Sprinter and Cartier Horse of the Year.

Racing on again the following season, the Temple Stakes, then at Sandown, the King's Stand Stakes at Royal Ascot and the Prix de l'Abbaye all fell to her power-packed if occasionally quirky brilliance, and she retained the title of Champion Sprinter. At the end of 1994, she was retired to Littleton Stud aged six, having won fifteen races, and several of her offspring were subsequently trained successfully at Park House; meanwhile Ian won the Nunthorpe of 1998 with her half-sister Lochangel.

As Lochsong began dominating the sprint division, another Kingsclere horse, Selkirk, was making his mark as a miler. He won the Queen Elizabeth II Stakes at Ascot in 1991 en route to being crowned Champion Miler, before adding the Lockinge Stakes at Newbury, the Celebration Mile, Goodwood and Newmarket's Challenge Stakes to his record in 1992, all by more than two lengths. In an epic finish to that year's Sussex Stakes at Glorious Goodwood, Selkirk certainly went down fighting, by just a head, to the talented Marling, but he finished the season as Champion Older Horse in Britain. Afterwards at stud he continued as a highly potent and much sought-after stallion until his death in 2013.





Selkirk

Another influential stallion from a similar time at Kingsclere was Tagula, winner as a two-year-old in 1995 of the July Stakes at Newmarket and of the Prix Morny at Deauville in France, and third in the Dewhurst Stakes. As a three-year-old, he was placed in the French 2000 Guineas and won the Supreme Stakes at Goodwood. Further success came in Ian's latter years, including in two stagings of the ever-competitive, big-field Cesarewitch Handicap at Newmarket, won in 1999 by Top Cees and in 2001 by Distant Prospect. That year also saw victories in the Sandown Mile with Nicobar, in the same course's Brigadier Gerard Stakes with Border Arrow and, for the second time, in the Mill Reef Stakes, with Firebreak.

## **PASSING THE BATON**

2003 - present

*A training dynasty is continued as father hands over to son. Classic success swiftly follows, and an era of consolidation and modernisation begins.*

Ian's last winner was on 18 December 2002 when Manicani won a maiden-race at Lingfield under Leanne Masterton, then an apprentice jockey and (now married as Leanne White) still part of the team at Kingsclere as a part-time rider. Having taken over the reins, Andrew Balding saddled his first runner on New Year's Day in 2003 when Duchamp ran in a handicap chase at Cheltenham and managed to unseat his jockey AP McCoy. The new trainer's first winner came back on the flat eleven days later when Easter Ogil, ridden in Ian's colours by stable apprentice Neil Chalmers, was successful in a Classified Stakes on the polytrack at Lingfield.

While Park House Stables is today widely acknowledged as amongst the most modern, well-equipped racing stables in the world, Andrew, his family, the staff and even perhaps the horses themselves enjoy and appreciate the constant reminder of just what a magical heritage



Kingsclere has gathered from the days of Sir Joseph Hawley and John Porter through William Waugh, Evan Williams and Peter Hastings-Bass to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The aim is to ensure that historic tradition continues to grow long into the future.



Ian and Emma Balding with Clare and Andrew