

STONERIGGS STUD

The home of Arthur and Evelyn Slack, where many great horses were created and where many lives have been shaped. Thank you to Arthur and Evelyn who kindly gave up their evening to share some of their memories with me, and also a big thank you to Hazel, who has been part of the Stoneriggs team for over 40 years, for her research and support. If there had been a Groom's Award back then, then Hazel would certainly have won it!

Evelyn came from a harness racing family, and has memories of driving their own horse Barbara M in her early teens, and having many successes on her. Barbara M was grandmother of Stoneriggs Arabrab who was just one of the many youngsters successfully campaigned in the two and three year old races in the early 80's.

Evelyn winning with Barbara M



Arthur in his youth was a competent rider winning flapping races long before he ever became involved in harness racing. Arthur explained to me that the first trotting horse he bought was Millers

Lad, bought from Mat Miller from Carlisle, paying £78. It's hard to know if this was expensive or a bargain at that time, what is clear is that it was a shrewd buy. Just 4 days later the horse, entered at Hawes, went on to win a heat @ 6/1, and with £10 on and prize money of £20 Arthur had immediately paid for his horse.

In 1960 Arthur returned and bought another horse from Mat Miller, one that most of us have heard of, Arthur's favourite, Dan Matthews. Dan Matthews was a bit of a wayward horse, in fact it was said that he would 'kill Arthur', and had a reputation for 'running out'. However the opposite was in fact true, he went on to race until he was 16 years old and gave both Arthur and Evelyn some of their most memorable wins. On first getting the horse Arthur trained him whilst shepherding the sheep or rounding up the cattle, riding him like an old riding horse. Arthur said that one of the first races they entered was Stainmore Sports, riding him in the saddle.

Arthur, as most of us know, has not got a typical jockey physique, weighing in at 14 stone. With the minimum weight being 8 stone he was in effect putting up 6 stone overweight. We have all heard the saying 'weight stops trains' it was a clear sign to all that this horse was some train when taking out his heat and coming 2nd in the final. For all Arthur was no lightweight he was an excellent horseman.

The next race for Dan Matthews was at Hawick Common Riding. Arthur and a very young Trevor Brown arrived at the races, Arthur going off to declare and weigh in sent Trevor to warm up the horse. On his return Trevor said he had warmed up 'real well'. A shrewd Arthur quickly went to the stewards to change jockeys to the lighter Brown and no doubt make a detour to the bookies. Winning the heat by over 50 yards it looked likely that a win in the final was a nailed on certainty, Dan Matthews had other plans, shooting off the track and into the rough.

In 1962 the newly married couple Arthur and Evelyn made a memorable trip to Musselburgh. Dan Matthews was entered in the saddle race on Tuesday evening and in the Famous Musselburgh

Pace (under the saddle) on the Wednesday. Tuesday night's saddle race looked like a nailed on certainty for Dan Matthews with Trevor Brown in the saddle, unfortunately just 30 yards from the line he made a break and victory was snatched from him. Not to be deterred on the Wednesday, a more focussed Brown took out both heat and final. Arthur still remembers having £3 on with Jim Hepburn at 33/1 to win the heat and final, whilst also backing him at 10/1 to win his heat and 20/1 to win the final. To say Arthur's pockets were bulging was an understatement.

It's a good job they won because the journey home became memorable for all the wrong reasons. Obviously distracted by the win, Arthur took the wrong road home and they ended up

Evelyn with Dan Matthews



winding their way down through Hawick. To make matters worse they then broke down. Fortune was however on their side, breaking down near a house that could not only accommodate them but also their horses meaning Arthur and Evelyn had to add an extra night to their impromptu honeymoon. Evelyn tells me that the people were so nice when they got their first home in Murton they called it Lyndene in memory of the kind people and their night in that cottage.

That wasn't the only win for Dan Matthews at Musselburgh, who returned to the winners enclosure with lifelong friend Josie Trevaskis in the saddle. Dan Matthews, a favourite of Arthur's, racing until he was 16 years old and winning 75 races. With a horse like this it is no wonder Arthur and Evelyn caught the bug.

Arthur tells me he also bought Dan Matthews sister Amanda, who he says was 'ok', but nothing special, she did however win 8-10 races, how times have changed, I would think a horse to be very good to be winning 8-10 races.

Whilst living at Murton not only did Arthur and Evelyn continue to race but they also bred Dales ponies, having their own Brighteyes breed. Their Dales stallion Stoneriggs Alex picked up wins at Barnard Castle show before going on to take out winning tickets at both the Royal Show and the Yorkshire Show. Arthur was also Chairman of the Dales Pony Society for 10 years. In 1974

Stoneriggs was the largest Dales Pony stud in the country.

Whilst at Murton Evelyn set up her own pony trekking business which was to continue for several years and was finally taken over by daughter Dianne. On the death of his father in 1968 Arthur and Evelyn moved to Stoneriggs along with children Dianne and the late Kenneth.

In the early 70's when attending the Canada Winter Fair Arthur and Evelyn took a bus trip to Mohawk. Whilst there Arthur started to develop a plan, a new chapter. He quickly realised that horses there were not really going that much faster than in the UK. He approximated that if a horse could do 2.03 in England they could do 2.00 in Canada and win races. On his return he started to seek horses to export, this he did for over 25 years, exporting over 200 horses. Tarport Shorty was one of the first horses he exported, winning his first 4 races and winning over \$30,000.

A horseman through and through little escaped Arthur's keen eye. A stallion in transit to Australia served up 10 mares for the late JS Jones, Arthur quick to notice that all ten youngsters went on to be winners. Although Arthur had success with stallions such as Sly Heel, Proper Time, Ambro Mystic and HT Navy he was keen to continue to improve bloodlines. Arthur went to Australia and bought Rajah Lobell bringing him back to the UK. Arthur believes this to be his best stallion, stating that most of his colt

foals were then subsequently exported.

After about 25 years of exporting Arthur realised that the breeding abroad had improved so much that the market for exporting was diminishing, but that his passion for racing in America and Canada was still very much alive.

Another chapter was about to start, one where Arthur has a partner, and this one wasn't for dancing. Arthur and George Harrison started buying horses abroad, to race abroad, where the prize money was certainly very attractive. In one \$1,000,000 race George and Arthur had two runners, Santana Bluechip and Robert's Range. To their absolute delight they took out 1st and 2nd places.

Arthur and Evelyn enjoyed an annual holiday to Florida. One year in preparation for their annual trip, Arthur sent out Stoneriggs Speed to Kevin Wallace telling him to 'get it ready to race' whilst they were in Florida. That year whilst Arthur and Evelyn were on holiday Speed won 5 races, and they had to delay their return not once but twice, only finally returning home after winning the final at Pompano Park. Stoneriggs Speed, daughter of Monkroyd Mystery, a whole chapter in itself in the Stoneriggs story.

Although on holiday, Evelyn never one to sit on her laurels, developed a new passion, spending hours watching and questioning the track farrier, known as 'The Miracle Man'. Evelyn became a

very accomplished farrier, and Arthur is certain that she could find 3 seconds with careful shoeing and a bit of tweaking of harness. What surprised me was that even now she could tell me all about Sly John and the way she had to shoe him, given that Sly John raced in the late 1970's this is pretty admirable!

And so on to Monkroyd Mystery, a horse of a lifetime and certainly a firm favourite with Evelyn. Purchased by Arthur when she was 5 or 6 years old, with an eye to future breeding. Arthur says he remembers watching her go around Droylsden, she had lots of head gear on and appeared fractious and certainly not focussed on her job. One of the first things Evelyn did was re-shoe her and take off all the head gear. Her record was astonishing, 68 wins from 147 races. Evelyn told me about running her at Hawes, where she started half a lap behind everybody and still (just) managed to win, and the time they went to Newton Stewart on a Friday evening winning heat and final on a rough field, before going to York and winning in 2 mins on the Saturday. What is more impressive is the winning of 19 races in a year (1988) and a further 18 races the year after. She was certainly a horse of a lifetime, winning over different distances, surfaces, in the sulky and in the saddle.

Another firm favourite with Evelyn is 'the people's Champion' and grandson of Evelyn's horse of a lifetime no other than Stoneriggs Mystery. Evelyn said

she always knew he was going to be special, and he certainly didn't disappoint.

I was surprised when I asked Evelyn which was her favourite win, feeling sure I was about to hear about another one of Monkroyd Mysteries wins, but no, this one was different, it was Overdale winning at Appleby Spring Harness Races. She said she had a perfect run, sitting him on the helmet of the horse in front, edging out, and Overdale going into overdrive. When I questioned her, she said winning on her local track, the silence from the crowd until she passed the line, then the deafening roar, all made the atmosphere electric. What made me smile was Evelyn's confession that she did it all with a humongous hangover, after having a heavy night partying with houseguests George Sinclair and Willy Moore.

One of my memories of Stoneriggs was it's open door policy, there was always somebody staying or visiting and Sunday lunch was pretty much open house. You certainly didn't want to be 'late to the trough'. Many members of the 'trotting community' have been touched by Stoneriggs and the Slack family and this was never more evident than at the funeral of Ken, when the church and town were filled with the who's who of both the thoroughbred and the harness racing worlds.

There have been so many people that have had the 'Stoneriggs' experience, too many to mention, but it would be hard not to mention Marion Munro (nee Huschka) who worked at Stoneriggs, and after taking out her licence just a month earlier got to drive Staley Queen in the Appleby New Fair final (on only her second drive). After winning the heat with Staley Queen



Evelyn sustained a broken leg in the next race, so the drive went to Marion, in what could be a scene out of National Velvet, Marion went on to win the final. In true Evelyn style she sat with frozen peas on her leg (kindly supplied by Holme Farm) to watch the final, before finally going off to hospital.

The Stoneriggs story would not be complete without talking about Arthur and Evelyn's two children, Dianne and Ken. It's hardly surprising that they too had the horse gene, both being horse people through and through. Both following in Evelyn's footsteps driving winners, and both going on to become successful BHA trainers.

Following on from several successful grass meetings at Green Hammerton in

1978 we saw the opening of York Harness Raceway, the brainchild of Arthur, Colin Johnson, Ronnie Harrop, Sid Harker and Jimmy Birch. The quintet had 10 successful years of ownership, with regular racing, full cards, large crowds and a successful bar. At this point some of the partners were wanting to move in different directions leaving Arthur and Ronnie holding the baby. Arthur says that although 5 became 2, Ronnie was the best partner a man could have.

Over the years Arthur has not only been owner, driver, jockey, breeder, importer, exporter, leading owner, track owner but also Track Steward, Chief Steward, Judge, BHRC Director and Vice Chairman of the BHRC, whilst Evelyn's resume is no less impressive;



breeder, owner, trainer, driver, leading driver, multiple times leading lady driver and farrier. Evelyn will never know how many young drivers tried to emulate her. She was a role model to many, and certainly years ahead of her time.

As if Evelyn's CV was not full enough when the decision was made to scale back on harness racing activities Evelyn threw herself into a successful career as a BHA permit trainer, becoming leading UK permit trainer not once but twice and joint leading trainer at Sedgfield, whilst Arthur continued with his lifelong passion - breeding and showing Swaledale sheep and farming.

Whilst Dan Matthews might be Arthur's favourite horse that he bought I asked him which was the favourite horse he bred - he replied, without doubt Stoneriggs Merc, by Fleet Decision out of Wheatley Patron, having 11 wins in 16 days trailing 80

yards. He laughed telling me if 'grandma' hadn't tipped out of the sulky it would have been 12!

I asked Arthur for a memorable proud moment, he says he remembers the Sire Stakes at York one year when they won 6 races (heats and finals) for 2 year old colts and fillies and 3 yr old colts, all of which were Stoneriggs bred, all had been born and broken in at Stoneriggs, trained and driven by Evelyn and even shod by Evelyn. I dare bet this feat has not been repeated since! What was evident was the pride in Arthur's face even now.

On hearing that I was researching for the Stoneriggs story, many people have told me tales of Arthur or Evelyn. I have picked my favourite one about each of them. Sue Young reminded me of Evelyn and how she 'conveniently' forgot Arthur's recommendation (well instruction really) not to go on the Flashing Lane at Appleby Fair, and how



Evelyn and Di at Appleby Fair

Evelyn conveniently forgot to tell Arthur that she had actually been on the Flashing Lane until a picture appeared in the local paper, and later in a book! Needless to say Arthur was not best impressed.

And Bill Hutchinson shared his memories all the way from Australia, he says 'Arthur 'You are the man', I had some fabulous times at Stoneriggs and I always enjoyed their company, however I was not as keen on him in the betting ring, in fact I would go as far as to say he was my nemesis. I really enjoyed following their horses in particular Monkroyd Mystery, I remember her race twice one bank holiday weekend, being second to Missing Link (formerly Stoneriggs Express) in the UK's first sub two minute mile, and then returning the

tables on him the following day over the longer distance. She was some mare, she also ran at a grass meeting this weekend taking out heat and final, so in three days she had run 4 races winning 3. What a horse, what a family.

I could honestly say I could write a book, there is so much to say.

However what is clear each in their own right have been ground breaking in their time and together they have been a formidable partnership and are both truly deserving of their place in the 'Hall of Fame'.

Hard to believe but Arthur and Evelyn, both now in their 80th year, are still at Stoneriggs, and yes there are still horses at Stoneriggs.,



Evelyn at 80 riding with her great grand-daughters