

The Teapot Club and the Irish Grand National

The earliest record of a race meeting was in 1848 when organised by the West Union Hunt group. The Ward Union Hunt had transferred its annual steeple chase meeting from Ashbourne to Fairyhouse in 1851 (T. Dooley). Although that first meeting was a point-to-point meeting, within 3 years it became an enclosed course, which began the process of turning it into the top National Hunt course in the country.

In those very early days, its top race was the **Citizens Plate** organised by members of the Tea-pot Club, the first on Wednesday 1st May 1850 being won by Kate, a mare owned and ridden by Mr. Lawless. There were 12 runners.. The next year on Tuesday 22nd April the race was won by an unnamed chestnut gelding by Slinge owned and ridden by Mr M. Murphy. The Sporting Intelligence of 1st May also notes an entry fee was 1 sovereign and a silver teapot. The winner was expected to provide a dinner “with a dozen champagne” for the Tea Pot Club members on that evening. A racing commentary and verse from the Freeman’s Journal of 1858 gives us an indication of the race and the excitement around the event.

“This truly and honestly contested race came off on Monday last at one o’clock, over the far famed Fairyhouse course, three Irish miles, interspersed with fair but with stiff fences of a rasping description, the lands all grass, without a ploughed field in the entire line. Eight nags came to the scratch, steered by their sporting owners, to contend for a prize of about forty sovereigns. “

The Teapot Steeplechase

Hither hasten, high and low,
Welcome to our splendid show,
See thy’re started, off they go,
What a glorious sight.
Who at home would basely stay?
Who from the race would keep away?
Who would miss a “Teapot Day”?
Go it, blow me tight.

The names of the owner-riders were Misters Hogan,

Lynch, O’Connor, Watson, Waters, Connelly, Tyrrell, and Malone. Mr. Watson’s horse Job’s Comforter “came in the gallant winner so little distressed that he would not have blown out a candle”.

The Irish Grand National today is a racing event that is looked forward to with excitement and relish especially for people within its vicinity. A steeplechase, it is open to horses aged five years or older. Since 1991, the distance of the race has been 3 miles and 5 furlongs; previously it had been 3 miles and 4 furlongs. There are twenty-four fences to be jumped. It is a handicap race, and it is scheduled to take place each year on Easter Monday. The Easter Monday fixture regularly attracted racegoers from Dublin, and it became known as the Dubs' Day Out.

The event was established in 1870, and the inaugural race meeting was won by a horse called Sir Robert Peel owned by Mr. Dunne. The winner's prize money was 167 sovereigns. In the early part of its history, it was often won by horses trained at the Curragh, and there were ten such winners by 1882.

Several winners of the Irish Grand National winners have also won its English counterpart at Aintree, but none in the same year. The first to complete the double was Ascetic's Silver, the winner of the latter version in 1906. The feat has been achieved more recently by Rhyme 'n' Reason, Bobbyjo and Numbersixvalverde. The most successful horse in the event's history is Brown Lad, a three-time winner in the 1970s.

In 1964 the most famous steeplechaser of them all was Arkle, born at Ballymacoll Stud just outside Maynooth. Owned by the Duchess of Westminster who owned Derrinstown, he brough great pleasure and a sense of pride to Maynooth families who were instrumental in his care while in Derrinstown. Arkle won the Cheltenham Gold Cup and went on to land the Irish Grand National in the hands of Pat Taaffe when trained by the legendary Tom Dreaper.

Research on the Tea Pot Club ongoing!

Sources

<http://www.greyhoundderby.com/Fairyhouse%20Racecourse%20History.html>

Freemans Journal, 1851, 1858 (Irish Newspaper Archive)

<https://www.irishnewsarchive.com/>

“A study of the changing social world of the landed

nobility of Co. Meath 1875-1945 by Terence Dooley.
<http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/771/1/>



county_meath.pdf
(From commons.wikimedia.org)
Skeleton of Arkle the horse at the Irish National Stud.

The Irish thoroughbred racehorse Arkle is widely regarded as the greatest steeplechaser in history. Regarded as a remarkable combination of talent, intelligence and bravery. Arkle was also the first horse to capture the imagination of the Irish and British public outside racing circles. He left everyone who witnessed him in awe of his remarkable abilities. Even when he was still around, the general belief was that racing would never see his kind again. Foaled in 1957, Arkle was bred by Mary Baker and later purchased by Anne, the Duchess of Westminster. He was sired by Archive and the mare Bright Cherry. His grandsire was the undefeated Nearco, one of the best flat racehorses ever.

This photograph of Arkle's skeleton was taken at the Irish National Stud in County Kildare, Ireland. This image was taken from the Geograph project collection. See this photograph's page on the Geograph website for the photographer's contact details. The copyright on this image is owned by Alan James and is licensed for reuse under the Creative Commons Attribution -ShareAlike 2.0 license.

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