

## Horse Racing on the Cartmel Peninsula up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century



Modern day Cartmel Races from CPLHS photo archive (courtesy of Marion Airey)

The only history of Cartmel Racecourse was published in 2001 and it contains this statement

*It is generally agreed amongst the racing correspondents to whom I have referred that 1856 saw the start of something approaching a formal race meeting at Cartmel... In by-gone days races were held on St Andrews Moor near Broughton Lodge which is about one and a half miles north of the village. [1]*

However since this book was published, many newspapers have been digitised, I have been searching them for items of local interest and I have discovered some early references to racing taking place on the Peninsula before 1856. I have also looked at books written about the history of the area and maps of the area.

*Sir Thomas Lowther was a sportsman, and fond of horse racing. The place where the horses were bred and practised was on a rather flat piece of ground above the gardener's house, and below the public road leading to Howbarrow. On this ground, according to tradition, village*

*sports and races were at one time held annually. In my remembrance, there was a piece of water on Holker Bank called "The Horse Wash," made by a dam placed across "Salesbrook;" the use of it being to wash the feet and legs of Sir Thomas Lowther's horses, by riding them through it – a rather strange and idle way, it would be thought now, of doing this!' [2]*

Sir Thomas was married to Lady Betty Cavendish, the daughter of the second Duke of Devonshire and he died in 1745.

The earliest news item appeared in the Lancaster Gazette in April and May 1807 stating that at 'CARTMEL RACES, on WHITSUN MONDAY, 1807, will be run for A PURSE OF GOLD, not exceeding, FIFTY POUNDS...' £50 was a huge sum of money in those days but was a minimum requirement of an Act of 1740 which had been introduced to control the number of small horse racing events.

No mention of racing at Cartmel is found again until 1836 when the Kendal Mercury dated 28 May 1836 reported that 'Cartmel Races were held as usual, on Whitsun Wednesday.' This suggests they were being held regularly but the fact that I cannot find reports from this remote place is indicative of the newspaper not being informed. Newspapers were not cheap and were not as well informed as they are today. Many villages had horse racing during Whit week and the local papers did not report them.

The Kendal Mercury of 20 May 1837 reported that 'Cartmel Races which took place on Monday last were numerous and respectably attended.' The 1830s news items were short, factual accounts recording that an event had taken place. The next one I have found was the Westmorland Gazette of 6 June 1846 which had a lengthy 20 line article about Cartmel Races.

*These races, which annually take place on Whit-Monday, are extremely popular, drew together this year's more numerous assemblage than was ever remembered before. The extreme fineness of the day, and the delightful scenery of Holker Hall Park, in part of which the races took place, had, no doubt, great influence in swelling the numbers...*

*A joyous ball in the evening, at each of the different inns in Cartmel, wound up the festivities of the day.*

The 1847 report specifies the location as Holker Hall Park. Holker Hall was the home of William Cavendish, the second Earl of Burlington, who

had settled at Holker Hall in the 1830s. He married Lady Blanche in 1829 and they had three sons. Sadly Lady Blanche died in 1840. William became the Seventh Duke of Devonshire in 1858. He died at Holker Hall in 1891.

A lengthy report of the 1847 race meeting was in the Kendal Mercury of 29 May 1847.

#### *CARTMEL RACES – MAY 24*

*J Stockdale, Esq.....) Stewards*

*E W Milne, Esq.....)*

*G Woodburn, Esq..Judge*

*Cartmel Races, for a series of years, have been attended by the highly respectable population of the neighbourhood, and much resorted to, as a place of amusement, by the numerous holiday folks who enjoy a few days' relaxation at Whitsuntide, after their yearly servitude. They are held by permission of the Earl of Burlington in his Lordship's park, amidst some of the most delightful rural scenery that the country estates of our nobility are so celebrated for, and have this year, from the spirited and generous exertions of a few resident gentlemen in the neighbourhood – gentlemen held in the highest estimation by the whole country round – assumed an importance which drew crowds of visitors from more distant localities, and caused such a numerous attendance and respectable meeting as its most ardent well-wishers could hardly have anticipated; and we have no doubt, under the same excellent arrangements, the 'Cartmel Spring Meeting' will continue to rise in importance, and afford as good sport as it did this year.*

The report continued by describing the Dog Trail and the horse racing. It concluded

*This finished an excellent day's racing, by 7 o'clock, to the entire satisfaction of the numerous assembly present. After the race, the visages of the knowing ones were considerably elongated, having backed Squib heavily against the field. When the horse racing was done, a foot race, one mile distant, took place for a subscription purse. Five entered, and after a keen conflict, Nevison of Windermere, was declared the victor, Newton, of Ulverston, winner of the Flan Handicap, being second.*

The Westmorland Gazette report also published on 29 May 1847 declared that the 'vigorous management of the stewards' was the reason for the large attendance. 'Many of the principal gentry of the county and numerous people from Kendal, Lancaster, Ulverston and the Lake District' attended the Spring Meeting as it was now called. The report noted that 'the attractive character of the sport at this meeting has placed it in a respectable position in the racing world.' The stewards had also engaged the Lancaster Brass band which 'gave great animation to the scene'.



This picture dated 1903 from CPLHS photo archive (courtesy of Albert Lamb) shows that dog trails were still a popular event more than 50 years later.

The 1848 Races report in the Kendal Mercury was also a lengthy one.

### *CARTMEL SPRING MEETING*

*This annual meeting came off on Whit-Monday, and from the untiring exertions of those gentlemen who were chosen stewards on the occasion, a large and respectable company was on the ground; and from the entry it will be seen some first rate horses attended. The Racing, upon the whole, was excellent, and we doubt not in a short time that these races will become little inferior to the 'Downs'. The races were held, by permission of the Earl of Burlington, in his Lordship's Park, and as it is adorned by some of the finest scenery, it presented an animated and exciting appearance.*

Again the day started with a hound dog trail followed by racing. The stewards were named as

*T. Ainsworth, Jun., Esq; C. S. Kennedy, Esq; E.W.Milne, Esq; H.F.Rigge, Esq; J. Stockdale, Esq; W. Strickland, Esq; R. Wilcock, Esq.*

In the same paper Flookburgh races were reported, having being held on 13 June. However poor attendance was blamed partly on the unfavourable state of the weather and partly on ‘the holiday folk attending Cartmel Races the day before.’ I have not found any other reference to horse racing at Flookburgh.

Bell’s Life in London and the Sporting Chronicle reported on 25 June 1848 that they had ‘received several communications ... and a detailed statement from the stewards at the meeting’. They confirmed that as the meeting was ‘under the “rules and regulations of racing” that Miss Margaret was very properly disqualified’.

The Westmorland Gazette of 2 June 1849 reported that last Whitmonday the races at Cartmel were not ‘so numerously attended as we have seen them in some former years the meeting altogether, was excellent and presented a scene of bustle and animation.’

What is not clear from these reports is the location of the Races. The 1846 report states Holker Hall Park but the 1847 and 1848 report it is as his Lordship’s park. The Racecourse today is located on land owned by the Cavendish Family of Holker Hall (Lord Burlington’s descendants) and it is known as Cartmel Park and is adjacent to the village of Cartmel.

The 25 May 1850 report in the Lancaster Gazette starts *Few places can boast a more pleasing locality than Cartmel, and very few a more attractive situation to hold the races at... We have no doubt much of the popularity is derived from being held where it is at present, in a part of the beautiful and extensive grounds of Holker Hall.*

Attendance was lower than in the previous two years partly due to poor weather at the beginning of the day. A dog trail and racing took place as usual but a new event took place at the end of the day when there were seven entries for ‘a trotting match for a handsome double-reined bridle’.

The Kendal Mercury’s 1851 report on June 14 also extolled the virtues of the location in ‘his lordship’s magnificent park’ which ‘enhances the

considerable pleasure of those who attend for the purposes of combining a pleasant stroll on the verdant carpet of Holker Parks, with an afternoon's racing amusement'. The racing was also hailed as 'superior to any of its predecessors' and the 'recent celebrity of Cartmel Races' was due to the 'exertions and support of their highly popular steward E.W.Milne, Esq'. Only horse racing was mentioned in the report.

E W Milne was born in 1821 in Manchester. In 1851 he is described as a farmer and lives at Low Newton. The 1861 census records him at Long Well, Whitwell and Selside, close to Kendal and he is described as a gentleman. The contents of the house were advertised for sale in May 1861 as Mr Milne was removing from the neighbourhood. In June 1862 he appeared before the magistrates on a charge of assaulting his wife. He was described as a gentleman living at Cartmel. The 1871 census shows him living at Croft Side at Cartmel. However subsequent census of 1881 and 1891 show him a patient at Haydock Lodge Lunatic Asylum where he died in 1892.

In 5 June 1852 the Westmorland Gazette reported that the races were less well attended for no apparent reason.

The Westmorland Gazette report for 21 May 1853 suggests that the races were being held in Cartmel.

*Cartmel on Whit-Monday was the resort of a numerous concourse of persons early anticipating the pleasures which that eventful day, in the annals of the place, are celebrated for producing, and at an early hour that usually quiet little town presented a lively and animated appearance.*

Hound dog trail was the first event followed by the usual horse events.

The 10 June 1854 report in the Lancaster Gazette was factual listing the horse racing and dog trail results. The Cumberland Pacquet and Ware Advertiser on 13 June 1854 waxed lyrical about the 'immense course of spectators' and also reported on the evening dance

*in which an immense number of holiday makers joined; and after spending hours in the pleasures of the ball-room, the party broke up, all delighted with the day's proceedings.*

In 1855 there is no doubt that the meeting is held in Cartmel as the Westmorland Gazette of June 2<sup>nd</sup> states

*At an early hour in the morning the usual quietness of the town was transformed into bustle and gaiety by the crowds which thronged in on foot and in every kind of conveyance available, to witness and enjoy the pleasure of the turf, in Cartmel Park.*

Attendance was good again. However the event was marred by an accident that was reported a couple of weeks later in the 16<sup>th</sup> June Lancaster Guardian when an inquest was held into the death of John Long. Joseph Bell of Lancaster was at the races on a horse when a dog attacked the horse's heels which made the horse jump about, scattering the crowd and causing Mr Long to fall. He was badly injured and died the next day.

The 17 May 1856 report in the Kendal Mercury again hinted that the event was a long standing, much loved event.

*We again bring to the notice of our readers, Cartmel Races as one of the foremost attractions during Whitsun week, and one which each circling year is welcome both to the villager and stranger.*

J Stockdale and R Wilcock were the stewards. A hound trail and a foot race for men and one for boys rounded off the day.

1857 races were reported in the Westmorland Gazette on 6<sup>th</sup> June and again Stockdale and Wilcock were the stewards. The prizes were larger than in previous years but only four horses were entered possibly because 'the Ulverston races not being held at the end of the week as before'. Mr Wilcock lived at Kents Bank and was the land agent for Miss Lambert of Boarbank House, Allithwaite. He bred horses. He died in August 1857.

The event in 1858 was special as it was the first time people had been able to use the railway to get to it. The Westmorland Gazette reported on 29 May that there was a 'special train run by the Ulverston and Lancaster Railway Company'. Attendance was high with the Park having a 'gay and busy appearance'. Again the stakes had been increased and 'a superior class of horse' attended. If there were other events besides the racing they were not reported.

A letter had been published in the Lancaster Gazette on 8 May 1858 complaining that 'year after year, in joint succession, have miserably bad looking horses succeeded each other on the Cartmel racecourse'. The solution according to the correspondent was to run cheap trips from North Lancashire using the new railway line. By increasing the attendance the

prize money could be increased. 'Let the races be an amusement, and not what it was before – a petty gallop – the sole object of which was to get money'. He continued that 'Cartmel races, in my opinion is dawning into future enlargement, and I hope to live to see the course galloped over at no distant period, by horses whose sires are at present the leading stud of the day'.

New stewards were in charge in 1859, Mr Lethbridge and Mr F Atkinson according to the 21 June edition of the Cumberland Pacquet and Ware's Whitehaven Advertiser. Entry was light with only three horses in each race but attendance was good with special cheap trains being run.

The 1860 meeting was well attended as usual according to the report in 2 June edition of the Preston Chronicle, Lancaster Gazette, Westmorland Gazette and Kendal Mercury but was marred by an accident to one of the jockeys. As well as the racing there were foot races and hound trails.

1861 was a special year. The meeting was held over two days and according to the advert announcing it in Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle 12 May 1861 'the course has been very much improved since last year'. The Westmorland Gazette and Kendal Mercury of 25 May 1861 said that the two days went well with large crowds but only two races took place on the first day because of the lack of entries. Two races were planned and successfully held on the second day. Foot racing and hound trail took place on the Monday but only hound trail on the Tuesday.

The 1862 races returned to only one day of events and was well attended according to reports in 14 June editions of Kendal Mercury, Lancaster Gazette and Westmorland Gazette but racing was poor and the Kendal Mercury report stated that 'we would suggest to the managers the desirability of substituting a stake for horses that have been regularly hunted with an established pack of hounds in Lancashire, during the season'. The Lancaster Gazette went on to call the first race a sham and berated the organisers for allowing the horses and jockeys to parade around for half an hour as there was no one to start the race. Other shortcomings were hinted at but not specified.

Thankfully the 1863 races were well organised and well attended according to the meeting reports in Westmorland Gazette, Kendal Mercury and Lancaster Gazette of 30 May and Whitehaven News of 4 June. Only horses from 40 miles around were allowed to enter. Mention was made of the difficult hurdle race, the first jumping event to be mentioned at Cartmel Races. Lieutenant Halstead and H Whittaker Esq

were the stewards. A hound dog trail was to be held as usual in the morning according to the Kendal Mercury of 23 May but none of the reports after the races mentioned it.

Rollo Pain appears not to have been aware of the races being run regularly since at least 1846 as he states

*From 1863 I think we start an unbroken run of meetings until the present day, except for the years of the two World Wars. [1]*

Cartmel Races were well established before 1856 and were a popular event during Whitsun week. This was a special week as it was when hiring fairs were held in towns such as Ulverston and Kendal and farm servants had a week of freedom and a pocket full of money. What is not clear is when the race course was established at Cartmel Park. The Ordnance Survey map published in 1851 which was surveyed in 1847-8 clearly shows the racecourse in Cartmel Park but it also shows the railway line which was under construction and not in use until 1857 so it is not evidence proving that the race course existed. However the first clear indication that the races were held in the village was in the 1855 newspaper report of the Races but the 1853 report hints that it was there. Why was it called Cartmel Races if it was held at Holker Hall? Could the land adjacent to Cartmel, where the race course is now situated be deemed to be part of Holker Hall Park? On maps Holker Hall Park is the area around the Hall. Why was there no mention of the races in Annals of Cartmel when Stockdale, the author, was a steward assuming J Stockdale is James Stockdale? Is there any information amongst his papers deposited at Cumbria Archives (Barrow office)? More research is needed to see if there is any evidence of where the races were held before the 1850s. Possibly there is some information amongst the Cavendish Papers at Lancashire Record Office. William, the Earl of Burlington kept an extensive diary which is available on microfilm at Cumbria Record Office (Barrow). Did he mention racing in his Parkland at Whitsuntide? William Field's log book, a unique book in the possession of Cartmel Peninsula Local History Society, does not mention the Races until the 1870s but entries for the 1850s are almost non-existent as William Field who compiled the entries upto the 1840s died in 1860 aged 90. His nephew's wife wrote a daily diary in the book from about 1870 to about 1890<sup>[3]</sup>. However an entry for 4 June 1804 does say 'A Grand Field day at Cartmel Park'.

Pat Rowland  
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## References

### Books

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- [2] J. Stockdale, Annals of Cartmel, Ulverston: William Kitchin, 1872.
- [3] William Field's Log Book, unpublished

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