

A short history of Findon and the racehorse



At the start of the 19C race meetings were held on the downland gallops below Blackpatch Hill at the western edge of Findon parish, the course being known as Michel Grove (an estate mainly in the neighbouring Clapham and Patching parishes). Later in the century race meetings were held on the gallops below West Hill at the south west end of Findon parish.

In the 19C horse racing featured much more in ordinary rural life than it does today, as the horse was still vital to agricultural activities and local transport. Knowledge of race horses in training was wide and racing was keenly followed as a sport and an opportunity for social gatherings, Race meetings were also being held on the downs at Lewes at this time and on the downs at Goodwood and Brighton in Sussex which still hold meetings today, like Epsom, Ascot, Sandown and Lingfield in Surrey. Fontwell and Plumpton in Sussex still hold regular national hunt race meetings over hurdles and fences while the race meetings at Newbury in Berkshire and Cheltenham attract the highest quality national hunt horses.

Around 1853-1854 Henry Padwick, a well known member of the Danebury 'Confederacy', a very successful group of individuals that sent out many 'Classic' winners from the racing stables at Danebury, near Stockbridge racecourse in Hampshire, built new brick and flint stables and a trainer's house, at the top of Stable Lane, Findon on the site of a cottage and outbuildings which appear on the 1839 Tithe Map. Adjoining pasture was used as paddocks with an extensive part of the downland 'sheepwalk' used as training gallops on account of the excellent turf. Initially John Barham Day, who had been a very successful trainer for Padwick and others at Danebury, later moving to Michel Grove stables, was installed as trainer at Downs Stables. At this time, Virago won the the 1000 guineas, the first English 'Classic' of the 1854 season.

Soon afterwards, the assistant Willam Goater, replaced Day as the trainer and successfully produced many winners for Padwick and others during the middle of the century. During this time the Hermit won the 1876 Epsom Derby, the third English 'Classic' of the 1876 season, as a three year old, having been trained and won all the lead up races as a two year old from the Downs Stables. Hermit Terrace, a group of artisan cottages in Findon was built shortly afterwards, by Goater.

Having focussed initially on training horses for high quality flat races, Downs Stables, with the arrival of Bob Gore as trainer in 1887, turned attention to training horses for racing over hurdles and fences (National Hunt). During this period the first two, of four Grand National winners trained at the Downs Stables, appeared, with Bob Gore horses, Jerry M winning in 1912 and Covertcoat winning in 1913. Later winners were Kilmore trained by Ryan Price in 1962 and Aldaniti, trained by Josh Gifford in 1981.

Towards the latter stages of the 19C, two new stables were built in Findon, Nepcote Lodge off Nepcote Lane and The Vale at the south west end near the gallops under West Hill continuing the earlier association of Findon with the training of horses for flat racing.

In 1952 Ryan Price bought Downs Stables, the paddocks and downland gallops going on to become the National Hunt champion trainer five times with stable jockeys Fred Winter and later, Josh Gifford, also becoming National Hunt champion jockeys for seven seasons up to 1969. The Grand National winner, Kilmore, the Cheltenham Gold Cup winner, What A Myth, three Champion Hurdle winners and very many major race winners at Newbury and Cheltenham were trained at the Downs Stables during this period, as well a growing number of flat race winners.



In 1970 Ryan Price decided to focus on training horse for flat racing and moved entirely to Soldiers Field Stables, House and paddocks, just south of Downs Stables where there was also easy access to the same downland gallops. The stables there had been used as overflow stables for Downs Stables since the early 1960s. Josh Gifford was offered and bought the Downs Stables and paddocks together with the National Hunt horses from the Ryan Price operation and set up as the next trainer of jump horses at Downs Stables. A very successful trainer himself until 2003, Josh Gifford then passed the mantle onto son, Nick Gifford, who still trains from and runs a successful Downs Stables today.

Both Ryan Price, training flat horses until 1980 and Josh Gifford training National Hunt horses from the amalgamated Downs Stables and Soldiers Field Stables until 2003, were very successful in their fields. Ryan Price trained 'Classic' Oaks and St Leger winners on the flat and Josh Gifford trained Cheltenham Festival and Newbury winners and a Grand National winner over jumps.

Since c 2000 Kristina (Gifford) has also trained eventing horses at Soldiers Field Stables, attaining Olympian status as a very successful rider.

Nepcote Lodge stables were converted to residential use in the late 1950s and The Vale Stables converted to residential and some commercial uses in the 1980s although there are still several loose boxes in use there today in association with the paddocks and former gallops below West Hill, mainly by leisure riders and former Downs Stable's jockeys.

Race horses are also still trained at the Windrush Stables with the associated gallops under Blackpatch Hill, the site of the race meetings held at the start of the 19C and until last year at the stables at Cissbury. Former staff from the Castle Racing Stables at Arundel also run a pony breeding, turn out and training stables near the top of Stable Lane, renting downland paddocks east of Elm Rise, east of Pony Farm former stables and Ivy Arch stables.

The training of racehorses at Findon is a characterising feature of the cultural heritage of Findon and its relationship with the downland landscape in this part of the National Park from the early 19C and still carries on today. This a living, cultural heritage directly

associated with the downland landscape at the settlement edge where there are four grass gallops including a steep canter, an 8 furlong all weather rising gallop and schooling grounds with hurdles and fences, that should be given priority for protection through planning policies in the Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan and a proposed Conservation Area at this eastern edge of Findon.





More detailed chronology

- 1816 Race meetings start to be held at a course known as Michel Grove on the downland gallops east of Blackpatch Hill just on the border of Findon and Clapham parishes. (1) The gallops are still used today in association with the Windrush Stables.
- There don't appear to have been further meetings after 1938 when the Michel Grove estate was acquired by the Duke of Norfolk.
- Later meetings were held at the gallops at the bottom of West Hill, Findon.
- 1839 Tithe Map shows an occupied building and outbuildings at the location of Downs House at the top of Stable Lane. The apportionment ref 236 describes the holding as 'Cottage, garden etc.....Richard Knowles' (2)
- 1840s John Barham Day, a trainer of several 'classic' winners at Danebury near Epsom, moves to the Michel Grove stables in the neighbouring parishes of Clapham and Patching. (3)
- 1855 A racehorse trainer is listed in Findon in Kellys 1855 Directory. (4)
- 1854-1857 Henry Padwick, well known in racing circles acquires a cottage, outbuildings, and land at the top of Stable Lane builds a new brick and flint stable yard and house, to become known as Downs Stables. Pasture land becomes paddocks and the adjoining downland open sheepwalk becomes training gallops. John Barham Day moves from Michel Grove, as Henry Padwick's main trainer. Virago wins the 1000 guineas, the first of the English Classic flat races, in 1854 and is considered the best 3 year old in England of that season. (5)
- John Porter, was an apprentice at Downs Stables at that time and later to William Goater,, moves on to become the most successful 19C trainer in England, based at Kingsclere Stables and establishing Newbury racecourse. (6)
- 1858 John Barham Day is succeeded as Henry Padwick's trainer at Downs Stables by William Goater. (7)
- 1875 Pony Farm Stables to the east of Stable Lane, just south of the Downs Stables, breeding arabian horses and ponies, shown on 1875 O/S map. (8)
- 1876 Hermit wins the Derby, the English 'Classic' run at Epsom, trained as a two year old at Downs Stables by William Goater for Henry Chaplin. Hermit Terrace, just off the High Street in Findon was built by Goater following the Derby win. (9)
- 1887-1941 Bob Gore becomes trainer at the Downs Stables. (10)
- 1890-1955 Nepcote Lodge Stables, off Nepcote Lane, a further race horse training stables, shown on 1896 O/S map, later becomes a riding school, then converted to residential c 1955. (11)

- 1896-1970 The Vale Stables at the south west end of Findon shown on 1896 O/S map a further racehorse training stables, converted to residential/commercial 1970s. (12)
- 1912-1913 Bob Gore wins back to back Grand National with Jerry M and Covertcoat at Downs Stables. (13)
- 1952-1969 Ryan Price becomes trainer at Downs Stables. Four times National Hunt champion trainer, stable jockeys Fred Winter and later Josh Gifford, champion National Hunt jockeys. (14)
- 1962 Ryan Price wins Grand National with Kilmore. (15)
- 1969 Ryan Price wins Cheltenham Gold Cup with What a Myth.
- 1970 Ryan Price sells Downs Stables to Josh Gifford and moves entirely to the associated training stables and trainers house at Soldiers Field to concentrate on racehorse for the flat. (16)
- 1970-1980 Ryan Price trains from Soldiers Feels Stables and House.
- 1970- 2003 Josh Gifford trains from Downs Stables and House and also with Soldiers Field Stables from 1980 - 2000.
- 1980 Josh Gifford acquires Soldiers Field racing stables on retirement of Ryan Price, as an expansion of his Downs Stables establishment. (17)
- 1981 Josh Gifford as trainer wins Grand National with Aldanati at Downs Stables. (18)
- 2000 - present Kristina Gifford moves to Soldiers Field stables as a training base for eventing horses, as the Downs Stables establishment downsizes.
- 2003- present Nick Gifford takes out the trainers licence at Downs Stables and continues to train race horses for principally jump racing. (19)

David Hutchison May 2018

- (1) *Directory of race meetings 1816-1820*
 (2) *Findon Tithe Map 1839*
 (3) *National Horse Racing Museum Newmarket, John Porter and William Goater*
 (4) *Kellys Directory 1855*
 (5) *Reminiscences of the Turf William Day pub 1886*
 (6) *National Horse Racing Museum Newmarket, John Porter*
 (7) *Wikipedia John Barham Day*
 (8) *O/S Map 1875*

- (9) *National Trust article, Macla article*
- (10) *National Horse Racing Museum Newmarket*
- (11) *O/S Map 1896*
- (12) *O/S Map 1896*
- (13) *Photograph in Stable Lane April 1912*
- (14) *Racing Post 2012 on anniversary of birth*
- (15) *The Price of Success Official biography of Ryan Price by Peter Bromley*
- (16) *The Price of Success Official biography of Ryan Price by Peter Bromley*
- (17) *Guardian article 2012*
- (18) *Ciaron Brown article on Aldaniti 16*
- (19) *Spectator A Genetic Advantage by Robin Oakley*



Downs Stables 1958 Trainer Ryan Price



Downs Stables 2015 Trainer Nick Gifford



Downs Stables Visitors Days Trainer Nick Gifford



Race horses in Stable Lane



Race horses in Nepcote Lane

News

21st May 2012

A hero's welcome

By Adam Trimmingham



Grand National winner Jerry M, who was trained in Findon



The Grand National was won 100 years ago by Jerry M, a horse trained in Findon, near Worthing.

As this postcard of 1912 shows, the whole village came out to greet him at the top of Stable Lane.

Jerry M, a seven year old weighing 12st 7lbs, made a record leap of 40 ft while clearing the water jump during the race. He was joint favourite and ridden by Ernest Piggott, grandfather of Lester. The trainer was Bob Gore.

A band played as Jerry M was brought to the village from Worthing station and all the children were given a tea party.



Jerry M in Stable Lane 1912



Aldaniti comes home to Findon 1981



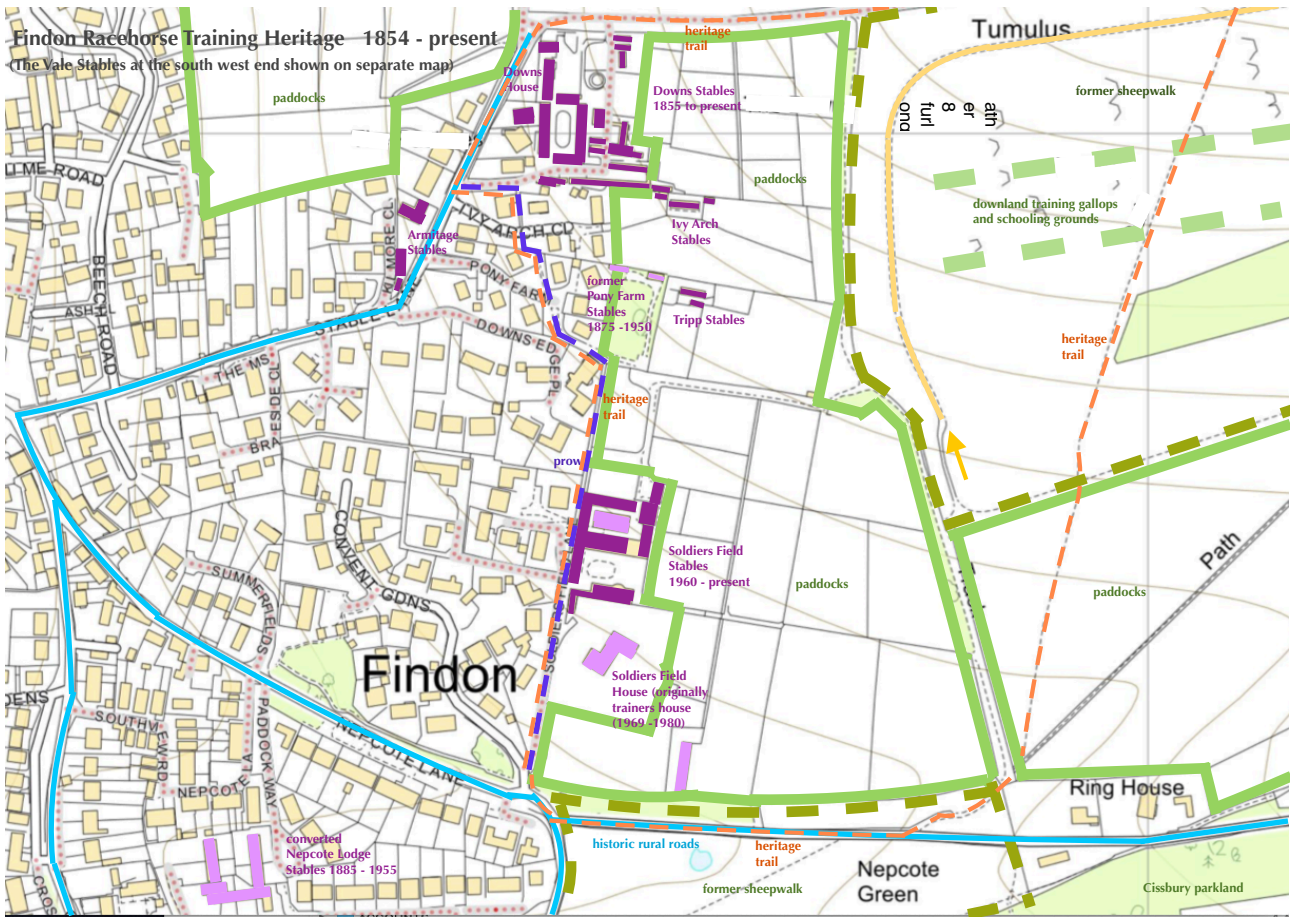
Aldaniti on the gallops Visitors day Trainer Josh Gifford



Glass painted plaques at Downs Stables Gates

photos courtesy of Nick Gifford Racing, Richard Bell and others

Findon Racehorse Training Heritage 1854 - present
 (The Vale Stables at the south west end shown on separate map)



1839 Extract from Findon Tithe Map



1875





Genetic advantage

What makes a successful racehorse trainer? Patience and an eye for detail.

Robin Oakley

What makes a successful racehorse trainer? Patience and an eye for detail. Man management and a flair for publicity. But the right genes help, too, and there Nick Gifford, the handler of the first-class hurdling prospect Straw Bear, does have an advantage. Son of the former trainer and ex-champion jockey Josh Gifford and of an international show-jumper mother, Nick didn't so much learn training skills as absorb them through the pores. There was no need, in his case, to seek experience in other stables, although he did show his independence by running his own point-to-point yard for three years.

You soon see why a preparatory career as a jockey wasn't an option for Nick. When I arrived at Downs House, Findon, and was directed to the box where the boss was working, only a fashionable tangle of long hair under a baseball cap was visible as he ministered to Wee Robbie's legs. But then 6ft 4ins of beaming trainer was uncoiled. Hunter trials and eventing were more his game, as with his sister Kristina, an international whose trophies stack the shelves in the main house.

The yard itself, blue box doors set in flintstone walls, oozes history. Victorian trainer John Porter, winner of seven Derbies, was head lad at Downs House for ten years. Bob Gore trained two Grand National winners there, Jerry M (whose headstone stands still in the yard) in 1912 and Covertcoat the year after.

Then there was the great Ryan Price, he of the wolfish grin and raking trilby. With Fred Winter and then Josh Gifford as his jockeys, the former commando won a Grand National from Downs House with Kilmore and campaigned top hurdlers like Le Vermontois, Beaver II and the controversial Schweppes Trophy winners, Hill House and Rosyth, one of whose victories temporarily cost Price his licence to train.

In February 1970, Price called in Gifford senior and told him to quit the saddle and take over so he could move to the nearby Soldier's Field yard and concentrate on Flat horses. Josh began training that April, quitting only at the end of the 2002/3 season after sending out the winners of all the big jumping handicaps like the Hennessy, the Mackeson and the Whitbread. Famously, he took the Grand National with Aldaniti, ridden by Bob Champion.

The first word you associate with Josh Gifford is loyalty. I will never forget hearing