

A History of the Burton Hunt 1672 -2004

The Burton Hunt has met in Burton for almost 350 years. The Hunt is part of our heritage and the mellow landscape of open fields, low hedges with spinneys and copses was laid out to provide cover for foxes and a good day's hunting. In the 18th and 19th centuries, foxhunting was a major sport with over 100 hunts spread across the country. There were no league tables to compare the performance of the respective hunts, but today the Burton would be in the Premiere League. The Hunt Masters, like their modern day equivalents in football, were willing to spend a fortune to provide the best hounds and the best horses in pursuit of their sport.



Today, the Hunt is under threat. To many it is a cruel and outdated sport and this year may be the last time the Burton will meet in the village. To the supporters of hunting it is the rhythm and the way of life of the countryside; the glory days of fox-hunting are well past but it represents a colourful thread of history which should be preserved. The huntsman will argue with some justification that foxhunting conserves the fox which otherwise would be gassed, shot and poisoned by those who regard the fox as vermin. That is the downside which the opponents of fox-hunting do not see.

Whatever your persuasion, the history of the Hunt makes fascinating reading. I hope you will enjoy this potted history of the hunt which will appear in 2 parts with the first part in this edition of *The Journal*.

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The first record of the Burton Hunt is a map captioned "Parte of Lincolnshire showing the boundaries for hunting ye foxe with our hounds in the year of grace 1672" It is signed John Monson, Burton Magna, the grandfather of the first Lord Monson who was created a peer in 1728. The boundaries of the hunt extended northwards to Gainsborough, across to Louth and Horncastle, then South to Sleaford and Newark. Lincolnshire was considered a wild and uncivilised area of fens – the cliff was still open heathland with a few woods and virtually no hedges. The Trent valley was often flooded and the land was too heavy to plough. The early hunts were very slow affairs starting at dawn with the field consisting of the Monsons and their friends wrapped in thick coats and mounted on heavy horses. The party would follow the hounds but there was little competitive riding or jumping.

The hounds were heavy and slow but had good noses to follow a cold scent. By 1731, Lord Monson had established the hunt kennels in Burton with Robert Cave as the huntsman assisted by 2 whippers in.

The social life of the hunt extended beyond the hunting season and in 1741 a clubroom was built at the Green Man Inn at Blankney for the benefit of the hunt which included most of the titled and land-owning families of Lincolnshire. Club members met once a month and seldom departed sober. By 1769 the social importance of the Hunt was increasing and the second Lord Monson, who succeeded to the title in 1748, enlarged Burton Hall to accommodate the elaborate Hunt breakfasts which preceded the day's hunting. New stables and kennels were built in Burton accommodating up to 100 pairs of hounds. The kennels remained in use until 1848. The houses known as Kennel Cottage and Westside are all that remain of the buildings today.

The nature of hunting was also changing with the sport becoming faster and the hunt followers jumping fences and galloping to keep up with the hounds. With a wide open countryside, Lincolnshire was ideally suited to this new style of sport. It demanded fearless riding and a pack of disciplined hounds bred for fox-hunting, combining speed, stamina and temperament with a good nose. From 1778 the third Lord Monson concentrated much effort into hound breeding with the line improved with imports from the Quorn, Brocklesby and Cottesmore packs. When the fourth Lord Monson died suddenly in 1809 at the age of only 24, no local man was willing to take on the huge financial commitment as Master of the Hunt. The pack was sold to Squire Osbaldeston for £1000 and he became the Master, thus ending at least 150 years of continuous hunting by the Monson family.

George Osbaldeston was a brash Yorkshireman with a considerable fortune who excelled at every sport he touched. As the new Master of the Hunt he lived in princely style in the Bishop's residence in Lincoln. He quickly fell out with everyone except the foxes which he pursued with great energy, courage and determination. He was less successful with his advances to the young Lord Monson's widow whom he courted with equal vigour; she jilted him for the Earl of Warwick.



**Tom Sebright
Kennel Hand to Osbaldeston**

In 1813 Osbaldeston resigned, but during a career as varied and unpredictable as a modern day football manager, his expertise was in great demand. He became master of many hunts and as a renowned breeder of hounds, it earned him the title of Squire of England within the hunting fraternity.



**Mr Assheton Smith
1816 -1823**

Throughout the 19th century, the Burton Hunt prospered under the Mastership of the landed gentry. Assheton Smith succeeded Osbaldeston who was followed in turn by Sir Richard Sutton (1823-1842). He was a very rich aristocrat of the old school with a passion for fox hunting which he regarded as his vocation in life. He inherited £300,000 as a child and spent it all on hunting.

Lord Henry Bentinck, 4th son of the Duke of Portland and from one of the richest families in the land, was Master from 1842-1863. Bentinck was single-minded, eccentric and dedicated to his sport. On becoming master, for a number of years he commuted daily on horseback from the family seat at Welbeck Hall near Mansfield to Lincoln, using a relay of 3 galloping hacks.



Lord Henry Bentinck

The first horse would take him to Dunham Bridge, the second to Lincoln and a third to the meet. Hunting 6 days a week, he would make a round trip of 60 miles in addition to the distance he travelled when actually hunting! Later he took up residence at the Great Northern Hotel and at the White Hart in Lincoln. He remained a bachelor all his life and he gave instructions to the management of the Great Northern that no female was ever to cross his path. When he left his room it was reported that chambermaids scuttled away like rabbits!

In 1848, Lord Henry closed the kennels in Burton (it is recorded that Lady Monson loathed the smell of the dogs) and he built new kennels at Reepham for over 200 animals. His horses were the best that money could buy and the stables were models of their kind.

There was a covered area for exercise on wet days and a system of Turkish baths for horses returned from hunting. When he stood down as Master in 1863, the Burton Hunt was in its prime and hunt guests included the Prince of Wales who stayed with Henry Chaplin at Blankney Hall. The Chaplins had lived at Blankney for 150 years and owned 25,000 acres of land in Lincolnshire as well as estates in Yorkshire and Nottingham.

The pack was purchased for £3500 by Henry Chaplin but the financial commitment went far beyond the price of a pack of hounds. There was the cost of a stable of 100 horses, the kennels at Reepham, the salaries of the huntsman and his assistants, grooms, whippers-in, kennel maids, puppy walkers, blacksmiths and a huge entertainment bill for the many dinners and functions associated with the hunt season.



Henry Chaplin

Chaplin also ran a string of racehorses, one of which won the Derby of 1867. In addition to all these interests, he was MP for Lincoln and engaged to the beautiful Lady Florence Paget. A bright future beckoned but money does not buy everything and life was about to deal a cruel twist to the ambitions of Henry Chaplin!



The Prince of Wales at a Meet of the Burton Hunt 1870

Bibliography:

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- The Burton Hunt – RB Fountain (1996)
- (Part II will appear in the March edition of the Journal)