

## From the Archives

### Fifty years of sport by Colonel Miler – part x

In 1883, the Colonel left Hertfordshire for Surrey where his father had built a house called Hartsfield at Betchworth which he described as a lovely spot at the foot of the northern line of Surrey Hills near Box Hill.



*Hartsfield at Betchworth*

In order to relocate some of the horses owned by the family, Colonel Miller and his sister made the fifty-mile journey on horseback. The journey began at daybreak in the month of May travelling through central London before the traffic. They enjoyed breakfast at Tooting before making their way through a series of greenfield sites at the time including Wimbledon, Banstead, Epsom, Walton Heath and the 'precipitous' Pebble Hill before arriving at Betchworth.

He remembers very little furniture which had followed them resulting in a period of picnicking in an unfurnished house. The move was timed perfectly to drive their tandem ponies to Epsom to see the winner of the Epsom Derby in an exciting finish to the race.

For the next twelve years, the Epsom Derby was an annual event that he enjoyed attending. The racecourse was only six miles from the house which they filled each year with guests, and he recalls the great winners that he was able to see at the height of their form. He then goes on to comment on the foxhunting which he regarded as being 'even worse' than Hertfordshire as the Surrey Union had few foxes in a County of big coverts rented by big syndicates from London.



*Epsom Derby*

At this point in his reminiscences, the Colonel refers to Tom Nickalls – a well-known stockbroker who owned a plot of hunting land where he acquired a successful reputation for his hunting skills. His field was described as a place which 'consisted entirely of a hard riding lot of thrusters from London' and 'there was no such thing as taking ones turn and the ordinary courtesies of the hunting field did not exist, especially after the hunt breakfast.'

The Colonel described Tom Nickalls as a big heavy man with a great character, sporting a beard like Mr Dunlop in the advertisements which were in the newspapers at the time. Nickalls was seen by the Colonel as a good horseman and always beautifully mounted especially when riding his thoroughbred horses. He continues his recollection with a story told about Tom Nickalls in his younger days in America. When his father sent him to ride in with some gold to the railway from his farm where the City of Chicago now stands. It seems that a band of 'more or less friendly Indians' got wind of where he was going and what he

was carrying. They waylaid him on his journey at which point the young Tom Nickalls greeted them in a friendly manner and proposed a horse race knowing the class of horse he was riding. This enabled him to ride further and further ahead of the Indians arriving safely at his destination with the gold intact.

Tom had also chosen a wife who enjoyed her time with horses and a fellow member of the Stock Exchange who hunted with both of them said 'beware those Nickalls – if you follow Tom on his horse Eries, he will break you and if you follow Mrs Nickalls across country, you will break your neck.

The Colonel then refers to their eldest son Norman, who became a great friend when they both joined the 17th Lancers on the same day sharing a bungalow in India.

Norman was fourteen stone seven pounds in weight. He was also an accomplished huntsman, polo player and cricketer. He commanded the regiment shortly before the first world war and was sadly killed at the Battle of Loos when he was in command of an Infantry Brigade leaving the Colonel to reflect on the life of his young friend before he was able to show his potential as a fine soldier which everyone thought he would be.

Colonel Miller then reflects on the time together between their respective sons during their education at Eton and Oxford University. He goes on to mention the many happy visits he made to the Nickalls' House at Patteson Court, Red Hill where they kept the kennels for the stag hounds. There was also a private cricket ground where matches took place involving members from both families.

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