



Carlyle House

DOCENT DISPATCH

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Carlisle, England and Alexandria, Virginia: An 18th-Century Racing Connection

by Jim Bartlinski

Horse racing was in John Carlyle's blood. Not only was Carlyle among the first Virginians to import quality Thoroughbreds to the colony, he also raced them. Horse racing was a popular pursuit among Virginia's gentry: even the burgeoning town of Alexandria boasted a race track. According to historian T. Michael Miller, Alexandria's early 18th-century track was located close to where Telegraph Road currently intersects with Interstate 95 (Cameron Run), where the former village of Cameron once stood at the head of Hunting Creek.

The first record of horse racing in Alexandria appeared in the March 13, 1760 edition of the *Maryland Gazette*. The paper reported that a "Run" or horse race was to be held Thursday, May 29th, "At the usual race-ground near Alexandria." The horses for the May 29th race were "to be entered on the Monday before at the Court House, with Messrs, [John] Carlyle, [Robert] Adams, and [Doctor John] Hunter, between the Hours of Two and Six o'Clock in the afternoon. The entrance money to be paid for the first race, thirty shillings for each horse, etc. And for the second, fifteen shillings each. Proper judges will be appointed to determine any disputes which may arise." Though a promoter of the race, one can assume that as a trustee of Alexandria and Justice of the Peace for Fairfax County, John Carlyle was likely among the "Proper judges" selected to review and settle challenges to the result of a particular race.

On April 3, 1760, the *Maryland Gazette* advertised the same May 29th "Run" to be held "At the usual Race Ground at Alexandria," but included some additional information that did not appear in the March 13th announcement. For instance, the winner of the first race would receive a "Purse of THIRTY POUNDS, the best in three Heats, (three Times round the Ground, which is about two Miles and a Half each Heat)," and that a second race would take place the following day—Friday, May 30th—for a prize of "Fifteen Pounds." A year later



"Lady Plate", Silver Coffeepot with Inscription, 1726.

on April 1761, John Carlyle, Charles Diggs and George Washington are listed in the *Maryland Gazette* as "Managers" of two organized races to be held at Alexandria's "usual Race Ground." The first race with a "purse of fifty pounds" was to be "Run" on Thursday, May 28th, and a second race was to take place Friday the 29th, with "TWENTY-FIVE POUNDS" awarded to the winner. The races held and sponsored in

CARLYLE HOUSE

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Alexandria by Carlyle were not his first exposure to the “Sport of Kings.” One need only look across the Atlantic to his boyhood home of Carlisle, situated near England’s northwest boarder with Scotland for evidence.

Accounts of organized horse races taking place in Great Britain have been recorded since medieval times. The majority of historians contend that the origins of these races lie in the 12th-century, when knights returning from the Crusades with swift Arab horses held informal “match races” to determine whose mount was the fastest. In John Carlyle’s hometown of Carlisle, prearranged horse races may have occurred as early as the 1300s, a tradition carried on to this day at the Carlisle Racecourse. But the first hard evidence of organized races occurring



in Carlisle does not appear until the 16th-century. The earliest recorded horse races in Carlisle were held on land given to the city by Edward III (1312-1377) called the “King’s Moor,” which evolved into “Kingmoor.” These contests held at Kingmoor became known as the “Kingmoor Races”

Oldest known Carlisle Silver Bells, Tudor period

and were run on important festival days by the local municipality and the “freemen” of Carlisle. A freeman was someone protected under the charter of a town or a person—not the property or serf of a feudal lord. These freemen enjoyed privileges such as the right to earn money, usually as part of a merchants or crafts guild, and acquire their own land. The guild members of Carlisle held their annual “Guild Races” at Kingmoor until 1850.

In an attempt to draw the finest horses and riders to Kingmoor Races, prominent citizens, town officials and trade guilds offered attractive prizes to the victors. The winner of the races held at Carlisle’s racing ground were presented with large purses of money and trophies made of silver, such as bells, bridles, plates and even a coffeepot. Although the distinction of possessing the oldest racing trophy in Britain goes to Lanark, Scotland (the “Lanark Silver Bell” dates back to at least 1165), the city of Carlisle still has in its possession two silver bells that date from the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth I (1533-1603), known as the “Carlisle Silver Bells.” The Carlisle bells were presented to the winner of the

Kingmoor Races. The larger of the two silver bells dates from at least the 1580s and is adorned with the inscription: “The swiftest horse this bell to take for my lady Dacre’s sake.” The “Lady Dacre” mentioned on the inscription may be Elizabeth de Greystoke, wife of Thomas, Lord Dacre, “Warden of The West March” for Henry VIII, residing at Naworth Castle, some twelve miles northeast of Carlisle. It is also possible that “Lady Dacre” is Elizabeth, daughter of George Talbot, fourth Earl of Shrewsbury, and wife of William, Lord Dacre of Gilsland, who was “Governor of Carlisle.” Regardless of the identity of “Lady Dacre” the Carlyles may have a direct connection to the Carlisle bells through the Dacre line. John’s older brother, Dr. George Carlyle, married Dorothy Dacre Appleby of Kirkclinton, a descendant of the ancient and distinguished Dacre family of Cumberland County. The second and smaller of the Carlisle Silver Bells is inscribed: “1599 H.B.M.C.” The initials are believed to stand for Henry Baines, Mayor of Carlisle.

Twenty years later in 1619, the Carlisle bells as well as other racing trophies are cited in a document addressed to the Mayor of Carlisle and “his bretheren” asking for “the silver broad arrows and the stock and the horse and nage bells with all expedition to be employed for maintaining of a horse race for the city’s use (upon the king’s moor) at such time yearly as they shall think convenient.” The silver arrows and stock have been lost, but the two bells (the horse and “nage” bells – “nage” being the northern Scottish word for a horse, i.e., a nag) would seem to have survived in the form of the Carlisle Silver Bells. Other local horse racing prizes that would have been known to the Carlyles are the “Lady’s Plate,” first present during the early 18th-century and a silver coffeepot (made in Newcastle), given to the winner of the Kingmoor races in 1726. It is not known if silver bells, bridles, plates and coffeepots were presented as trophies in the races managed by John Carlyle in Alexandria but silver plates are still among the honors bestowed upon horse and rider first past the post at the Carlisle Racecourse.

Without doubt John, his older brother George and their father William were spectators at many of the races held at Kingmoor. It is also possible that as important members of the Carlisle community, they may have had a hand in arranging some of these contests. In any event, the runs held at Carlisle’s Kingmoor track provided John a model he could refer back to when organizing the horse races held at the “usual race-ground near Alexandria.”



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Question of the Month:

How do leeches work?

Once the mainstay of barber-surgeons and physicians throughout Europe, leeches have been used for at least 2500 years. The oldest recorded leechings credit India's practitioners, although there is much debate among physicians and historians as to the procedure's actual genesis. Medical historians connect the English word *leech* with the Old English word *laece* meaning 'physician.'



Woman with Leech Bowl, Willem van den Bossche, 1639.

Only three varieties of the leech are considered suitable for medicinal use. The most reliable leech is the *Hirudo medicinalis*, or European medicinal leech, native to Central Europe and Asia Minor. A lucrative business, leeches were successfully harvested by wading into infested waters, then pulling them from one's feet and legs. Western Europe and the U.S. peaked their importation of these leeches by the early-19th century.

Once in the hands of practitioners, leeches were put to use as a bleeding instrument. A medicinal leech has three jaws, each jaw containing 100 teeth. Physicians apply leeches simply by placing them where desired. If a leech does not latch on to the patient voluntarily, the physician can make a small puncture which draws blood. The

blood attracts the leech, who then uses its powerful suckers to draw the blood in.

Leeches secrete fluids that scientists have rarely been able to replicate successfully. A leech's saliva contains an anesthetic, an anticoagulant, antihistamines, and possibly even an antibiotic. The anticoagulant, hirudin, was successfully engineered in 1986, and provided relief from some of the side effects of heparin, another anticoagulant.

The historic record reports several concerns over the use of leeches: Leeches are small and their bodies are very elastic. They tend to migrate away from the place where they have been positioned. Leeches often disappeared, only to be found again inside a patient's wound or airway. Until the early-20th century, leeches were often reused from patient to patient, contributing to disease transmission.



Leeches create a Y-shaped bite.

Geoff Tompkins/
Science Photo Library.

Additional Resources:

Biopharm Leeches of Hendy, South Wales

<http://biopharm-leeches.com>

*Follow the "Links" section to an article by Robert Weinkove.

National Museum of Health and Medicine

<http://nmhm.washingtondc.museum/exhibits/exhibits.html#permanent>

Human Body, Human Being Permanent Exhibition

*Featuring live specimens of medicinal leeches.

UCLA Biomedical Library

www.library.ucla.edu/biomed/his/blood/leeches.html

Museum Teacher Meeting

Ever think about a new way to serve at the Carlyle House? Consider becoming a museum teacher. These docents, already trained in the general interpretation of the house, add an extra component of training for school tours. Currently, the education department offers three school tours—*History in a Haversack*, *Discovery Through Trash*, and *Don't Get Weary*. So far during 2006, we have served 1200 school-age children from the surrounding area. In 2005, we served 990.

We provide training in the tour material and in group management techniques. If you are interested in being involved in this way, please contact Erin. Our next meeting for museum teachers is Monday, November 13 at 10:00 a.m. The museum will be closed that day, so please report to the classroom.