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0521808774 - The Sport of Kings: Kinship, Class and Thoroughbred Breeding in Newmarket
Rebecca Cassidy
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1 Introduction

A brief and selective history of flat racing in Newmarket

> The earliest English horse race of which we know, took place, not at Newmarket, but at Weatherby in Yorkshire, in the reign of the Roman Emperor Severus Alexander (a.d. 210).
>
> (Lyle 1945: 1)

This book does not concern itself with identifying the first ever English horse-race or with tracing the ancient history of racing generally. It is concerned with the modern period of horseracing, from the time at which it was codified in the nineteenth century, to its contemporary form. The main impetus for this codification came from the Jockey Club.

The Jockey Club was established in 1750 as a gentlemen's club, meeting most often in the Star and Garter in Pall Mall. The Club also met at the Corner, Hyde Park, owned by Richard Tattersall. When Tattersall moved to Knightsbridge the Jockey Club moved into the Bond Street residence of their agents, Weatherbys (Black 1893). This trio of institutions – the Jockey Club, Weatherbys and Tattersalls – are still dominant forces in English racing, though their roles have changed since the formation of the British Horseracing Board in 1992.

The records of the Jockey Club do not reveal its original purpose, and there does not seem to be any explicit statement of intent to control racing. Membership was almost exclusively aristocratic. The term 'jockey' referred, at the time, to the owner of the horse, rather than its rider, and so it could be said that the Club was, initially, a racehorse owners' association. In 1752 the Jockey Club leased a plot of land in Newmarket, and the original 'Coffee Room' was built. According to their own history, the Jockey Club was soon approached for advice where disputes arose on 'the turf' (Jockey Club History 1997: 1).[1]

Horseracing at Newmarket had been established well before the Jockey Club chose to locate itself on the High Street. Newmarket's place as the 'HQ' of racing developed with royal patronage, beginning with Richard II, 'But it was under James I that the village really became Royal Newmarket' (Lyle 1945: 4). This royal association culminated with Charles II, who famously conducted the court from Newmarket during autumn race meetings:

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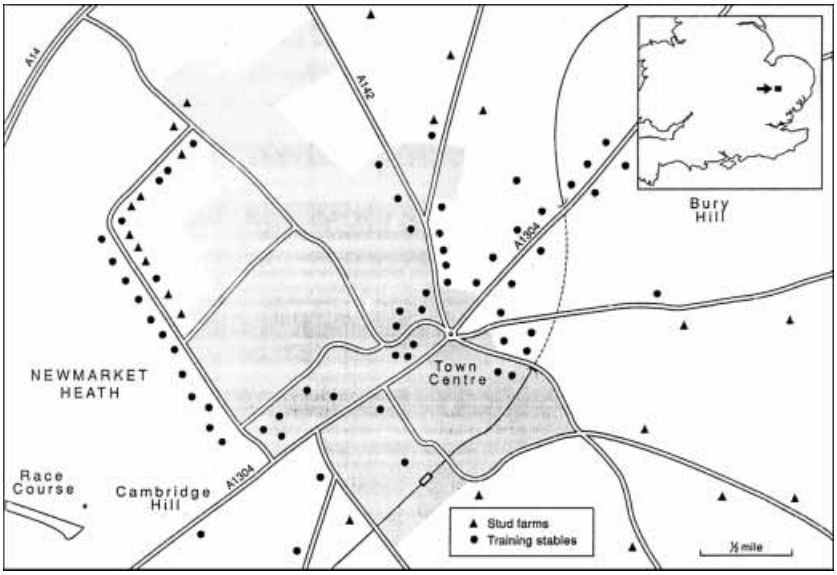

Newmarket, showing the locations of stud farms and training stables

Thus we find the turf, rising like a Phoenix from the ashes on the accession of Charles II, thoroughly reinstituted as our great national pastime during the Merry Monarch's reign . . . To this resuscitation the king extended his powerful patronage and support. (Hore 1886: 92)

Newmarket's royal patrons reinforced the existing association of racing, and the horse itself, with prestige and status. As James I wrote in his *Religio Regis*, or *The Faith and Duty of a Prince*, 'the honourablist and most commendable games that a king can use are on Horseback, for it becomes a Prince above all Men to be a good Horseman' (quoted in Lyle 1945: 7–8).

In more recent times, Princess Anne has ridden in amateur races and the Queen is and the Queen Mother was substantial racehorse owners. Britain remains the most prestigious of all racing nations, and although its prize money is lower than in France and America, the five annual Classic races still attract the richest owners in the world, most obviously, the Dubai and Saudi Arabian ruling families. Royal patronage remains one of the strongest influences over the image of British racing. This influence was partly preserved by the work of the Jockey Club in codifying the rules of racing according to aristocratic ideals.

The Jockey Club famously established the right to 'warn off' in 1821, when a tout known as 'Snipe' was banned from Jockey Club land (Black 1893: 82). The practice of 'warning off' whereby the individual is forbidden from entering

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any Jockey Club land remains. Two men were warned off for ten years in 1998 after collaborating in the formation of an allegedly fraudulent syndicate. There is no right of appeal, and a 'warning off' ends any professional involvement in racing. The Jockey Club retains the right to end individual careers where it feels racing has been brought into disrepute.

The authority of the Jockey Club began to extend beyond Newmarket after 1832 when a notice in the Racing Calendar effectively called the bluff of all other local authorities by announcing that the Club would only adjudicate on Newmarket races, as those elsewhere were run under such a wide variety of rules.[2] This was a first step towards the standardisation of the rules of horseracing, and the contemporary Jockey Club notes with satisfaction that it has 'finally culminated in reciprocal agreements with the Jockey Club, and Turf Authorities of practically every country in the world where racing takes place today' (Jockey Club History 1997: 3).

The introduction of a series of revised rules of racing after 1858 reflects the rapid period of change undergone by racing at this time. Although the old rules had remained unchanged for over one hundred years, the new rules lasted until 1868, only to be revised again in 1871 (Jockey Club History 1997: 2–3). Where race meetings had been a haphazard affair with the atmosphere of a local fair or carnival, they were now becoming highly organised with formalised procedures for starting, weight allocation and judging. Of course, the increased sophistication of the rules of racing succeeded in reinforcing the role of the Jockey Club and its place in the government of racing.

Weatherbys employees still describe themselves as the 'Civil Service' to racing. Weatherbys is a family business, its current head being Johnny Weatherby, descendant of the original agent of the Jockey Club. Weatherbys holds the records of owners' colours (the unique colour and design of the silks worn by the jockey on a particular owner's horse), names (horses' names must be registered with Weatherbys before they may race) and financial affairs for the Jockey Club. It takes entries for races and deals with the administration of licences and permits. It has recently registered as a bank and can provide a variety of financial services in addition to handling racing accounts which pay entry fees and Heath tax, and hold winnings.

Richard Tattersalls, the original host of the Jockey Club when they held their meetings at the Corner in Hyde Park in the 1750s, founded his own dynasty of thoroughbred racehorse auctioneers (Orchard 1953: 1). Tattersalls is no longer family-owned or run, but remains perhaps the most prestigious bloodstock auctioneers in the world, located in Park Paddocks in the centre of Newmarket. Tattersalls attracts the best bred yearlings to the annual Houghton Sales, where 215 horses were sold for a total of 34.5 million guineas[3] over three days in October 1999 (Tattersalls website 2000).

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The role of the Jockey Club has changed since the inception of the British Horseracing Board in 1992. The Board is now responsible for racing's finances, political lobbying, the form taken by the fixture list, marketing (an innovation) and training:

> The BHB will strive to maintain significant improvements to the finances of Flat and Jump horseracing, as an important spectator sport, leisure industry and betting medium. It will aim to do this for the benefit of all those who invest in Racing and derive enjoyment from it, and in order to enhance British Racing's competitive position internationally. (British Horseracing Board Annual Report 1993: 1)

The Jockey Club retains responsibility for discipline, security, 'the conduct of a day's racing' and the licensing of racecourses and individuals; its current role has been described as racing's policeman. Membership of the Jockey Club is still internally elected and retains its male-dominated, aristocratic emphasis; thus in 1997, of 112 members, 89% were men, 44% were titled. Of the fifteen honorary members, five were British royals, four Sheikhs, two held military titles and two were Weatherbys.[4]

In addition to regulating racing, the Jockey Club is the major land owner in Newmarket. The Jockey Club estate extends to 4500 acres in total, of which 2800 are training grounds, plus three stud farms, a farm, seventy-five residential properties, twenty commercial properties and The Jockey Club Rooms. This portfolio includes both the Rowley Mile and July Racecourses, the Links Golf Club, the National Stud land, the National Horseracing Museum, twelve leasehold training yards and, in a surprising diversification, two Happy Eater restaurants. Trainers pay a Heath tax to the Jockey Club (£69 per horse per month in 1997), that entitles a horse to use the training grounds.[5] The Jockey Club has defined its new role as 'setting and maintaining standards for racing' (Jockey Club Annual Report 1997: 1).

The funding of racing in Britain has developed in accordance with its executive growth. The Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB) was instituted in 1963 in order to assess, collect and apply the 'monetary contributions from bookmakers and the Totaliser Board (the Tote)'. Until January 2002, a levy was raised on all legal bookmaking, at a level of 1.25% of turnover (approximately £50 million annually). Betting off-course had been liable to General Betting Duty, at 9%, of which the government took 6.5% (approximately £300 million annually). Betting on-course was tax free. Racing also has its own betting enterprise, the Tote, the profits of which (£4,457,000 in 1999) go directly into racing. The HBLB spent £29,471,000 on prize money in 1999, which constituted 49% of expenditure (Horserace Betting Levy Board 2000).

Racing is therefore, for the time being, funded primarily by contributions from the betting public, collected by bookmakers and distributed by the HBLB.

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Many owners complain that ownership is unprofitable, and that bookmakers should pay more for the privilege of using racing as a betting medium in order to boost prize money and thereby sustain what is the sixth largest industry in Britain. The bookmakers invoke the plight of the punter and say that he should no longer subsidise what is a rich man's sport. The impact of off-shore and internet betting operations further complicate these arguments as the levy becomes increasingly difficult to gather in a de-regulated betting market. The structure of the funding of racing is set to change in the near future, from the present levy system refereed by the government to an independent system based upon payments made by bookmakers for media rights to television pictures and information on runners and riders.[6]

Both French and American racing developed 'in conversation with' the British tradition. In France, the Jockey Club was founded by Lord Seymour, in 1833 (Slaughter 1994: 4), and this link was concretised in the language of racing, which still includes 'le Jockey Club', 'le yearling' and 'le turf'. In America, the Jockey Club was formed by August Belmont I, in 1837, and the Stud Book was opened in 1896. The same equine bloodlines are followed in America, and as August Belmont IV was elected chairman of the American Jockey Club in 1982, it may be suggested that similar concerns also appear to inform the human contingent of racing in the States (see Bolus 1994).

Thoroughbred racing in America is standardised in a way that the British racing establishment finds unseemly. The majority of American races are held on dirt (as opposed to turf), and race 'tracks' are all tight, left-handed ovals. In Britain courses are sufficiently wide and sweeping to facilitate manoeuvres which make the draw less important. British racecourses are all different, some are left-handed, some right-handed, undulating or flat, narrow or wide, they are thought to offer a more thorough test of a horse (and therefore of its breeding). Furthermore, American horses are permitted to run on drugs including Lasix and Bute, which disguise bleeding and lameness respectively. No drugs are permitted in Britain, further encouraging British breeders to assert the superiority of their bloodstock. In Britain, thoroughbred racing enjoys a virtual monopoly, whilst in both America and France, trotting and harness racing are also popular. These forms of racing employ non-thoroughbred racehorses, and were scorned by my British informants.

Apart from the intrusion of more recent forms of racing, perhaps the most important difference between Britain and France or America is the system of wagering. France enjoys a Tote monopoly, a pool betting system which returns its profits to racing. In America, bookmaking is only legal in Nevada, and the majority of betting is with the American Tote (Munting 1996: 111). All bets with the Tote are settled at odds calculated according to the weight of support for each horse. They do not, therefore, involve the personal contact on which the wager with the bookie depends:

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> Nowhere have bookmakers come to play such an important role in the betting market as in Britain and Ireland, though they remain legal in many other parts of Europe and the world. (Munting 1996: 110)

The relationship between the bookmaker, the punter and the producers of racing is unique to British racing, and is a reflection of broader dynamics within British society. In 2000, 7422 races were held during 323 days racing at the 59 British racecourses. Fourteen thousand racehorses in training ran for £72 million in prize money. According to the British Horseracing Board's website, five million people went racing. Racing remains the most televised sport on British terrestrial television, and a huge ten million people watched the Grand National in 2000. Racing and breeding employs 60,000 people, or one in eight agricultural workers in Britain. It provides an estimated 70% of income for the betting industry that employs some 40,000 people. In the year 1999–2000, £7 billion was bet off course in Britain's 8500 Licensed Betting Offices, generating £344 million for the government in betting duty. In addition, £94.5 million was bet on course with the Tote. In the breeding paddocks of the UK and Ireland, 30,000 mares and 1000 stallions produced approximately 14,000 foals in 2000, the next generation of champions.

Making connections

Although kinship was central to anthropology throughout the twentieth century, English kinship was not the focus of any sustained or influential study until the 1980s. Even after this time, as Cohen indicates, it did not receive the same attention as more 'exotic' kinship systems/patterns might:

> We seemed to be apologetic for taking up readers' time with descriptions of systems and processes which were manifestly less elaborate, exotic, mysterious and, therefore, intellectually demanding than those to be found in Africa, Asia, the Pacific or the Middle East. In short, we were defensive. (1990: 218)

Part of the explanation for this defensiveness can be extrapolated from the centrality of kinship to the classic anthropological texts and its perceived peripherality 'at home'. The proper subject of anthropology before the latter half of the twentieth century was 'primitive society'; studying kinship 'at home' required an explanation where studying elsewhere did not. In more recent anthropology, however, 'primitive society' has been revealed as illusory, a construct fashioned in opposition to the society to which early social anthropologists belonged.

Kinship had been presented as the source of sociality in those societies that apparently lacked an institution which anthropologists could equate to either a state or a commercially driven division of labour. Thus unilineal kinship

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governed politico-jural affiliations in, for example, Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940). English kinship, described as 'cognatic' or 'bilateral', apparently lacked the ability to do so. The main organising principles of 'Western' or 'civilised' society lay elsewhere: kinship was a purely domestic affair, concerned only with the nuclear family. Cognatic kinship, conceived in opposition to unilineal reckoning, became a sort of 'non-kinship'.

English kinship, recast as the study of the family, was the province of sociology, rather than anthropology, a division of labour that reinforced the belief that kinship was somehow more fundamental in non-Western societies:

> [Anthropologists] have investigated kinship in more primitive societies where it is of so much greater importance than our own that the study of society is sometimes in large part the study of kinship. (Willmott and Young 1960: 187)

The sociology of the family traced a historical progression from a pre-modern era in which roles were ascribed by birth and tradition was looked to as an authority for the present, through a modern period in which tradition was replaced by scientific rationality, faith in progress and individualism. The nature and even the name of the third stage of this progression, most commonly described as 'post-modern', remains contested. The relative fluidity of the second phase was the subject of Bott's work on *Family and Social Networks* (1957):

> the individual constructs his notions of social position and class from his own various and unconnected experiences of prestige and power and his imperfect knowledge of other people's . . . He is not just a passive recipient assimilating the norms of concrete, external, organised classes. (1957: 165)

Though these observations seem unremarkable now, they make a stark contrast to Jamieson's descriptions of the pre-modern era:

> the intimacy of close association did not necessarily result in empathy, because this was a highly stratified social world in which each knew his or her place in the social order . . . Marrying and having children were economic arrangements and the relationships which resulted were ones in which men were assumed to rule and own women and children. This was sanctioned by religion, law and community norms. (1998: 11)

These descriptions reproduced the common-sense version of 'progress', from a society in which social position was fixed, determined by birth, to a society in which the 'individual' created a unique lived trajectory, unhindered by social mores and restricted only by hugely depleted structural limitations, a version of progress reproduced by one of Bott's informants in 1957:

> It might have been simple in the Middle Ages, everything being so definite you know exactly what your place was and did not expect to be anything else. Now it is all uncertain and you don't even know what your place is. (1957: 174)

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Bott, working amongst the middle class, was reluctant to correlate class status with extra-familial kin contact. Firth, however, was prepared to reproduce, however apologetically, a sweeping framework in which upper and lower classes were characterised by the greater importance of extra-familial kin, whilst the middle class exemplified the Parsonian nuclear family:

> Crudely generalised, such views seem not too implausible. They place the kinship attitudes of the middle classes somewhere between the interest – both co-operative and competitive – in perpetuation of economic and political assets shown by the upper classes and the warm protectiveness of the propertyless working classes. (1969: 16)

Firth concludes that extra-familial kinship amongst the middle class is 'expressive rather than instrumental' (1969: 461–2).

The dismissal of cognatic kinship and the accompanying reduction of English kinship to family and class was halted in the late 1970s and early 1980s with Fox's *The Tory Islanders* (1978), and Strathern's *Elmdon* (1981). Whilst Tory Island kinship provided a framework, manipulation of which could enable the distribution of scarce resources in a harsh setting, Strathern went further in showing that:

> Village and kinship together provide images of class. It is not just that they are about particular classes in the direct way in which Elmdoners experience their situation, but they are about class in general. A person's own particular position need not totally determine his view of the overall structure. (1981: 200)

The sociological work that attempted to find correlations between 'family', 'extra-familial kin' and 'class', was thus replaced by an anthropological method sensitive to differences in the meanings of the terms themselves.

Whilst mainstream social anthropology until the middle of the last century concentrated upon the 'other', recent work has attempted to redress this balance by considering the tools of anthropology as similarly 'constructed'. In particular, the 'natural facts' of kinship – of biology and reproduction – have been scrutinised by anthropologists wishing to stress their contingency.[7] This study uses local ideas of relatedness in Newmarket in order to illustrate how kinship looks when the biological 'facts' of pedigree that support it are exposed.

Nature in Newmarket

The idea that relationships with animals can tell us something about relationships between humans is not new within social anthropology, as Evans-Pritchard's comments about the Nuer confirm. Recently, however, the study of animal–human relationships has enjoyed a period of intense attention, partly due to an invigorating cross-fertilisation between academic disciplines, particularly

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history, philosophy, cultural theory, biology and anthropology.[8] Recent studies of human–animal relationships have consequently shown a greater awareness of changes through time, environmental and political factors, and the place of animals in human systems of discrimination, be they based upon race, class or gender.

The breeding, buying, selling and racing of horses in Newmarket make visible the ideas that govern human relations within racing society. In order to understand this contention, the origin story of the thoroughbred racehorse must be understood. The English thoroughbred is a breed of racehorse which originated with three imported stallions; the Darley Arabian, the Godolphin Arabian and the Byerley Turk, and a number of domestic mares in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It has been 'selectively bred' since this time, so that all of the present generation can be traced back to these three stallions through the General Stud Book, which has recorded every mating and its produce since 1791. It is the fastest breed of horse in the world over any distance further than a quarter of a mile. Racing in Britain is concerned almost exclusively with thoroughbred racehorses, which became a specific breed in the era in which racing society began to define itself, the two developing in parallel.

The idea that nature is everywhere and always the same thing and that it always stands in opposition to culture has been dismissed by anthropology. As Strathern states, 'No single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in Western thought, there is no consistent dichotomy only a matrix of contrasts' (1980: 177). Ideas of nature to be found in Newmarket include its separation from humans as the object of human efforts directed towards its improvement. The thoroughbred racehorse has been selectively bred for three hundred years, in the belief that racing ability is hereditary and therefore one must 'breed the best to the best to get the best'. Nature, in this context, is perceived as a recalcitrant but talented child who refuses to fulfil its own potential and so must be strongly directed. However, the opposite notion, that animals, particularly horses and dogs, are fundamentally the same as humans, and that all are part of nature, is also present, facilitating an intersubjectivity between the thoroughbred and its human attendants.[9]

In addition to the contextually sensitive ideas of nature in Newmarket, I should add that racehorses are polysemic. In relation to racing society, the racehorse is an ambivalent creature. Not animal, not person, not object, not subject, not entirely artificial and not entirely natural. The obtaining relationship between horses and racing society, in which racehorses are sometimes part of 'nature' to be improved, sometimes part of a 'nature' that includes humans, is comfortable. During fieldwork, processes that encouraged members of racing society to articulate these organising principles included the General Election,

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the ban on British beef and the bomb threat at the Grand National. More generally, racing society confronts outsiders, including those who bet and attend race meetings, in ways that highlight their own uniqueness. These encounters are discussed in chapter three. However, it was the 'literalising process' (Strathern 1992b: 4–5) implied by the technologies of Artificial Insemination (AI) and cloning which led racing society to explain their ideas about nature with greatest force.

Summary

Chapters two and three of this book describe Newmarket and its inhabitants, and, in particular, those people involved in the production of racing. In chapter three I describe the means by which racing people are reproduced. I concentrate upon the elite of racing society, those who see themselves as 'real' Newmarket families, and claim a familial connection to Newmarket and to racing. A particular family, and their ideas about their own 'pedigrees' and those of others, is described in order to suggest that racing is thought to be 'in the blood'.

Chapters four and five engage with the public side of racing, but go beyond the image presented on television or by the tame racing press. Chapter four is a guided tour of the racecourse, where racing is made public. I discuss segregation on the racecourse, the differences between the variously priced enclosures of the racecourse and their correlation with sumptuary distinctions and dress codes. Chapter five discusses the consumption of horseracing by punters in the betting ring and in Licensed Betting Offices. Betting on horseracing is the dominant form of gambling in Britain.[10]

Chapter six describes a different kind of gamble: the action that takes place in the auction ring, where pedigrees are articulated financially in the sale of yearling thoroughbreds. The purpose of the chapter is to present the ideology of pedigree in the context in which it is most fully played out, amongst horses when they are being treated as objects. Chapter seven describes the apprenticeships experienced by lads in Newmarket.

Chapters eight and nine combine to describe the ideology of pedigree in greater detail. The intersubjectivity between humans and animals that makes pedigree such a powerful organising principle in Newmarket is examined. Chapter eight takes as its starting point Ingold's assertion that, 'Contrary to the normal assumption, the borderline between humans and animals is anything but obvious, clear and immutable' (1988: xii). In chapter nine I identify the 'natural facts' of reproduction assumed by the ideology of pedigree. I examine the sales catalogue as the site of graphically reproduced ideas of heredity and procreation and therefore of kinship, gender and class. The impact of AI upon the racing industry, and the means by which it is opposed are discussed

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