

THE MAGNET CUP 1960

Film ID: 4210 **Year:** 1960

This is one of a very large collection of films made by film production company C. H. Wood of Bradford: over 3,000 films and videos dating back to 1915. This highly significant collection is of immense value, and especially for Yorkshire. Charles Wood senior was a notable gas engineer, gaining an OBE in the 1880s, and who was later to design Moscow's gas system after the 1917 revolution. His son, Charles Harold Wood, set up the company of C. H. Wood's in the 1920s. Charles was employed by both Pathe and Gaumont as a cameraman for the northern region. C. H. Wood specialised in aerial photography and filming. Charles used the expertise he had developed through his aerial photography to good effect during the Second World War when he pioneered infra-red lenses, used by the dambusters, and for which he too earned an OBE. When his sons, David and Malcolm Wood, took over the company, which was for a time known as 'Wood Visual Communications'.

The company operated from Manningham Lane before moving to Leeds Road in Bradford. They were one of the most important film producers in Yorkshire, making mainly promotional or publicity films for private companies, not just local, but also national and international, for such as Yamaha, Castrol and Wallace Arnold, the holiday tour operators. These films, known as Public Relations Films, were distributed all over the world. They also made films for non-commercial organisations, covering special events, training films and public information films, especially road safety films. David expanded the business into making a wide variety of films and won awards including a BISFA and at Cannes and Bologna.

Perhaps most impressive within the overall C. H. Wood Collection is the large number of films they made of motorcycle racing, mostly moto cross, such as the Scott Trials and the Ilkley Grand National. These include pre-war vintage motorcycle racing, and cover the 1940s and 1950s. Charles Wood started out as an apprentice fitter with Scott Motorcycle Company in Bradford, and was himself a motorcycle trial rider. David was making sound recordings of motorcycle events from the age of eleven. It was in filming motor cycling that his career as a filmmaker began – there will be more on these films in the Context for Darlington Motor Club Scott Motorcycle Trails (1951).

The director of this film and the following two (see below), Fred Dewhirst, is listed as making several films on the British Film Institute's online catalogue, Screenonline (the entry list C. H. Wood productions on Screenonline is only partial), including one with Robert Sharp also on YFA Online, 700th Anniversary Of Bradford Market Charter (1951). Apparently Fred, who was a police Sergeant, made the first film to be used as evidence in a court, ironically enough on street betting, in 1937-38 – also within the C. H. Woods Collection.

This film is one of several made of the Magnet Cup at York Races, which they also filmed in the following three years. They not only covered these races, sponsored by John Smiths of Tadcaster, but also filmed the John Smiths brewery in 1959 and 1964 in order to promote their beer. The film of the following year provides an account of the training on the Yorkshire Wolds, and the work of the stables. It also shows the preparation behind the scenes for the big day at York racecourse, and goes through the runners and riders in more detail. The 1963 film is narrated by the well-known TV and radio presenter Stuart Hall (of 'It's a knock-out' fame), who joined the BBC in 1959.

Perhaps not coincidentally, 1960 was also the year that the Betting and Gaming Act legalised off-course bookmakers for betting on competitive sports events, followed by the Betting Levy Act 1961. As can be seen, horse racing was broadcast live on TV, with 1960 being the year of the first live broadcast of the Grand National. The mushrooming of betting shops after 1960, each one having a TV in the corner, greatly boosted TV broadcasting horse racing. For more on horse racing see the Context for Pontefract Races (1960).

This year, 2010, marks the 50th anniversary of the Magnet Cup at York, which started with this race in 1960, although it is now known as the John Smith's Cup. This was the first commercially sponsored flat race in Britain, taking place at York on 23 July 1960 as the Magnet Cup, named after the beer. Just prior to this, in 1957, Whitbread introduced the first modern sponsorship with their Gold Cup, but this was for a National Hunt race (over fences) at Sandown Park. The 1960 Magnet Cup had prize money of £4,125 (up to £4,211 the following year); a lot for the time. It was a handicapped race for three-year olds and upwards, limited to carrying between 6 st. 10 lbs. and 9 st. 7 lbs. over 1 mile 2 ½ furlongs. It was a very strong field, with the second favourite, Blast, having run third in the Eclipse Stakes, and winning the Queen Anne Stakes. The winner, out of a field of 14, was the three-year-old filly Fougalle, who held on inside the final furlong to win by a head from Billum. The jockey was N McIntosh, the owner R Booth and the trainer Rupert Beasley.

The following two years the cup was won by horses owned by Major Lionel Holliday – whose colours of white, maroon hoop and armlets were among the most familiar silks of the day – in 1961 with Proud Chieftain and in 1962 with Nortia, both trained by Dick Hern, who was to become a legendary trainer of the flat, and one-time trainer for the Queen. Later on, in 1969, Lester Piggott was to get his only Magnet Cup winner with My Swanee.

York has long been famous for its horse racing, of which there is a long tradition going back to Roman times. The current course at Knavesmire dates back to 1730 – shortly before Dick Turpin was hanged there in 1739. The race ground is seen as one of the best in the country, being recently selected to host the Royal Ascot and the St Leger. Five years after this race, in 1965, a new five-tier grandstand was opened. After the Ebor Stand was opened in 2003, a new modern day record attendance was set of 42,514 for the 48th John Smiths Cup in July 2007 – though not quite matching the 150,000 who turned out to see the famous Flying Dutchman in the Great Match of 1851. For more on York racecourse see the Context for From Rome he Came (1982).

John Smith's are in fact the biggest commercial sponsor of horse racing in the UK, sponsoring also the Grand National, and the John Smith's People's Race in 2007. There are also 90 John Smith's 'No Nonsense' races across 27 courses from Brighton right up to Perth. The John Smith brewery at Tadcaster goes back to 1758. In 1884 brotherly rivalry led to William Smith, the brother of John, building a brewery next door to the old brewery, which subsequently passed to Samuel, his nephew, who founded Samuel Smith's. Whereas John Smith is now owned by Heineken,

having been owned by Courage and Scottish and Newcastle, its smaller namesake, Samuel Smith's remains independent and better known for its real ale. Magnet, John Smith's only 'cask', or real ale, hardly survives today, and in fact may well not last for long, having moved production from Tadcaster to Burtonwood near Warrington in 2007. Now it is the 'no nonsense' keg 'smooth' beer that dominates, and which is a best seller.

Attendance at, and betting on, horse racing remains a big pastime. However, moves are afoot to try to make it more attractive, even though figures from the governing body, the British Horseracing Authority, show that 5.7 million people went to the races in 2009, up slightly from 2008; and that it is second only to football for attendances at sporting events in the UK. The growth of betting online has meant that more is spent gambling on other sports. Hence a new campaign, Racing for Change, has been set up to counter this trend. Horse racing is dependent on the bookmakers for prize money (money from the betting levy – the tote, 10% of betting profits – dropped by a third between 2008 and 2010, although 90% goes on the improvement of horseracing each year).

Those who are concerned by the treatment of horses will have less sympathy for an industry which employs 20,000 full-time workers and 80,000 in related industries. Animal Aid claim that there is large scale neglect, injury and fatalities in horse racing. Nevertheless, many companies, alongside John Smith's, are involved in horse racing sponsorship, including Emirates, Renault UK, Bonusprint and Royal Bank of Scotland. This accounts for some 20% of prize money. Time alone will tell whether horse racing will go the way of dog racing, but it is still a long way from that.

References

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York Racecourse

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[Animal Aid Background Notes On The Horseracing Industry](#)