

SPORTING NEWS 1891



South and West Wilts Hounds at Knoyle House c1920

Cub Hunting with the South and West Wilts Hounds

Knoyle Feast is an institution that dates back far beyond the memory of the oldest tradition extant in that part of Wiltshire, and is kept up religiously as a general holiday by the rustic population of the neighbourhood. Nearly as long as fox hunting has been established, hounds have met at Knoyle Windmill on the Monday nearest to the 20th September, for the purpose of cub hunting, and quite a history might be compiled anent the same custom did a continuous and reliable record exist.

How many sportsmen have passed away, who, in years gone by, looked, even as we now look, for the eminence where stands the old mill at the fair expanse of pasture land that stretches away to the horizon, almost unbroken for miles by the ploughshare, across the copse, spinney and hedgerow of a district sacred to the goddess Diana. Here in the far off days of 'Squire Farquharson of glorious memory, and his huntsman, Old Will Treadwell, the same scene has been enacted. Here the group of hounds surrounding the horses of the hunt servants, and in turn surrounded by the circle of horsemen and pedestrians by the hundred, stand today as they have stood on each past occasion, once more to bear evidence that the love of hunting still exists amongst us, a love that even the ghost of the dreaded barbed wire, now creeping over the country, cannot subdue.

The view is as fine as ever, the atmosphere, cleared by the storms hanging around above us, causing each detail to stand out clearly and surely; the eye of a sportsman can desire no fairer scene to rest on. The glorious Vale of Blackmore lies beneath us like a map, our own part of it in the immediate foreground, and the outlines of the strongly-fenced meadows beyond are lost in the far distance.

Time brings its changes and here today we greet our new chief, Mr J E H Martin, who succeeds our late popular master, Captain Burchall Helme. But the latter is still with us and is riding a recent purchase which took the first prize in the heavy-weight class at the Compton Stud Show, a well-bred liver chestnut. Mrs Martin, on her favourite mount, a good-looking grey, is also there; Miss Wyndham, Lady Pelly, and one or two other ladies have faced the inclement morning to join us; whilst Lord Percy and Lord Ernest St Maur and Sir Harold Pelly have come from Maiden Bradley, and later on His Grace the Duke of Somerset canters over on his hack from the same point. Captain Chaloner, fresh from his polo in Ireland, is looking very fit on Ab-del-Kader; Captain Bridges and the new occupant of Hayes House, together with Messrs A Gosling, Robert Elling, B Herrington, Corbyn, Woodford, J Mitchell, T Baker, and some dozen or more of well-known faces, compete the muster roll as the hounds – today the dog pack – move away to draw Skidmarsh, the covert in the bottom.



Here we come at once on a fine litter of cubs and halloas all rounds and inside the little wood tell us that three or four foxes are on foot. In another moment, the deep notes of the hounds awaken the echoes as they own the scent and bustle backwards and forwards till they force one away, at the end of some fifteen minutes in covert, to run into him in the hedgerow below. Returning, the same performance is repeated and another goes over to the majority. Drawing the gorse below the windmill, they then trot away to Lugmarsh, leaving the ever increasing crowd of excited pedestrians to watch from the heights above. To the delight of the latter, they speedily find again and run right back over the vale to Skidmarsh in full view.

Thence they own a line to Haddon Hill, but it proves a stale one and they turn back to a hedgerow where a cub has been viewed, to push him across the meadow to Hang Wood, in which several more are on foot. Now the rain comes down in earnest and we sit in our saddles on the brow of the hill above the Cleeve (two or three of us whose homeward way lay over the downs) and watch and listen as we shelter beneath the foliage of the scrubbed oak trees. Far below, in and around the woodland, we catch sight of the dots of scarlet as Freeman and his whips flit to and fro, the melodious notes of the pack making music to our ears meanwhile. Cautiously, nearly to our horses' heels, creeps a noble cub up the brow, his mask turned towards the bottom whence come the unwanted sounds, his bright russet coat, sleek and smooth, forming a charming contrast to the dark green belt of fern on the slope he is traversing. May we hallo? Prudence says no, as they are evidently busy with a fox below.

Quietly we stay till another comes up to us, this time with the pack not very far from him, and in the tail end of the storm which, when once in the open fairly wets us to the skin, we hunt slowly round the hills towards Longmead where he runs us out of scent and we give him up. Pleasant is the journey as, under brighter skies, we canter over the smooth turf on our homeward journey, countless rabbits scurrying away to the big earths on the sides of the down, the sheep looking up with mild eyes as we speed past them. Another storm overtakes us as we ride up the Deverill Valley, and we settle into a steady trot and "take it as it comes" till we reach our welcome shelter, wet and tired, but well pleased with such a pleasant foretaste of joys to come in future, if fortune favours us so far as to be permitted to take part in them. E.S.M.

Western Gazette Friday 25 September 1891