

The influence of Eastern blood on English cavalry horses during the course of the 17th century

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In the early sixteenth century military commanders, deploying squadrons of heavily armoured men-at-arms, regarded Neapolitan coursers as the cavalry mount par excellence on account of their strength and courage. By 1600, however, developments in military tactics, which increasingly emphasized firepower at the expense of the cavalry's role as a battering ram, made such horses obsolete. Change began in the 1540s with the emergence of the mounted *reiters* of Germany. Though plate armoured like the men-at-war, they wielded a wheellock pistol rather than a lance and carried a sword and dagger (and perhaps a harquebus or the later musket). They performed the manoeuvre known as the *caracole*, in which columns of horseman advanced on the enemy at a trot and by rank discharged their pistols at the enemy at point-blank range.¹ When, as a result of Gustavus Adolphus's reforms in the early seventeenth century, the mounted arm once more propelled itself at pace at the enemy, its members rode into battle on lighter, quicker and more nimble horses. Many of them possessed Eastern blood, either directly (Barbs, Turcomans and Arabians) or indirectly (Spanish ginetes). Prince Rupert even rode on a 'spectacular', black Arabian, probably bred at a royal stud, when he led the defeated royalists out of Bristol on 11 September 1645.² He was privileged because Arabians rarely appeared in elite stables before the Restoration. By the time that England was fighting Louis XIV's armies at the turn of the seventeenth century, however, they had become more numerous.

Military developments

The wide-ranging developments that occurred in all aspects of warfare during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which brought the infantry into greater prominence, had less immediate impact on England than on the Continent because the country remained largely aloof from the European conflicts and therefore had less reason to change. Between the late fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries the royal army fought few campaigns abroad and even more rarely without the support of continental allies. In general, therefore, home forces were slow to adopt contemporary continental practices and, when needed, employed foreign mercenaries to do the job. Even so, soldiers from England (and from Celtic parts of the British Isles) were not unaware of technological and tactical advances being made abroad, many of them learning about them at first hand. Thousands of soldiers of fortune left these shores to fight in the army of one or other European power, their choice mainly but not exclusively dependent on religious or political convictions. In times of crisis at home these men returned, forming the nucleus of an army and providing a set of instructors who could teach raw recruits the rudiments of musket and pike drill or cavalry manoeuvres of *caracole* or charge.³

Back at home they adapted their knowledge to local circumstances. This made sense, for when the English went to war it was commonly within the British archipelago, normally against the Scots or Irish, though occasionally against rebels in the country itself. Between 1639 and 1654 civil war consumed all parts of the British Isles. As a result, campaigns tended to display a domestic air, even if returning soldiers brought continental practices with them. The nature of England's army also made it difficult for it to react quickly to developments on the Continent. If the Crown had possessed a large standing army, it would have found it easier to make the necessary changes. Opinion in the country was, however, against the very notion of one, a resolve strengthened by the experience of the power wielded by the army in the Interregnum (1649-60). Charles II faced opposition in Parliament when he created several guards regiments after the Restoration, but it was only when James II sought greatly to enlarge the army in the years 1685-88 that the threat became a real one.⁴

During Elizabeth I's reign the authorities gradually modernised the English army: infantrymen acquired pikes and muskets, and the cavalry, pistols and carbines. Horsemen armed with firearms seem to have been uncommon in 1569, the year of the rising of the northern earls. In a letter written to the queen on 26 November 1569 Sir Ralph Sadler thought the fact that the rebels included mounted pistoleers proved that the earls had been planning the uprising for some time.⁵ If little had changed in the North by 1584,⁶ the situation was better in the South, where the Spanish threat was felt more acutely. There, some units of light horsemen did possess firearms. According to the instructions sent to the Norwich officials in 1584, a light horseman should be armed with a pair of pistols, a staff, a sword and a dagger and wear a skull (steel cap) and a jack or a burgonet and corslet. He had to ride a serviceable horse or gelding, seated on a light saddle.⁷ The lighter petronels or shot on horseback firing petronels or carbines made their appearance at the same time, hence the government's attempt to oblige the justices of the peace to pay for their maintenance. Demi-lances had only fitfully embraced firearm technology; few units had become pistoleers and many still continued to carry axes as their second weapon. In the 1590s the Ordnance Office was still purchasing the parts for making lances, ordering staves and heads from separate suppliers for subsequent assembly.⁸

Modernization continued after James I made peace with Spain in 1604 and accelerated in 1618 as a result of the attempt of Elector Frederick, the king's son-in-law, to wrest the throne of Bohemia from the Habsburg candidate. In 1621 James made preparations to send an army, comprising 25,000 foot and 5000 horse, to Germany in order to protect Frederick's patrimony of the Palatinate. The composition of the horse reveals that by then both arms of the cavalry had adopted firearms. The 3500 cuirassiers, hitherto demi-lances, carried pistols and the 1500 petronels, carbines.⁹ In the event, the expeditionary force never set out, mainly because the native arms industries could not supply more than a fraction of the required weapons and munitions in the time available.¹⁰ At the beginning of the British Civil Wars only the Scottish Covenanter forces continued to maintain units of lancers, for neither the Parliamentarians nor Royalists armed their cavalry with the weapon. Very few cuirassiers survived too; in England Sir Arthur Hesilrige commanded the only regiment so clad, known as the 'lobsters' because of their articulated armour. They achieved some initial success but few emulated them. Musket balls could penetrate their armour and troopers disliked the added weight, which restricted their mobility and made them vulnerable when unhorsed. At best, troopers wore a corslet and pot, though many merely donned a thick leather buff coat. Also, according to General Monck, horses capable of bearing the weight of a cuirassier were hard to find.¹¹ This is debatable but even if true it only illustrates contemporary opinion, which emphasised mobility rather than poundage. Lighter, more agile horses of 14½ to 15 hands were therefore preferred. They were the kind of horses that William Vaughan was referring to in a report to Lord Moore of an engagement with the Irish Confederates in November 1642. Writing from Dundalk, he stated that, 'I sent off Lieutenant Hatcher with ten nimble horse, who went safe to Carrick'.¹²

Initially, the cavalry tactics employed by the two sides in the English Civil Wars offered a distinct contrast. The Royalists, like the Swedish army, advanced in close order, sword in hand, but differed from them in that they charged at greater speed and did not fire their pistols at all until the *mêlée*, possibly because of a shortage of weapons. Later in the war Rupert adopted the Swedish device of stationing detachments of musketeers among the cavalry. The Parliamentarians, on the other hand, adopted the more defensive Dutch model which relied on the firepower of musketeer and dragoon units to blunt the charge of the enemy cavalry before its own horse mounted a counter-attack. Over time their tactics moved towards those employed by the Royalists prompted, it seems, by Cromwell, who came to realise the value of taking the initiative. Cromwell's insistence on keeping formation and retaining control meant that his troops did not charge as quickly as did the Royalists. It was not easy to rein in troops of cavalymen in full flight but Royalist cavalry commanders, notably Rupert, have long been criticised, somewhat unfairly, for not reforming after a successful

sally.¹³ Fifty years later, at the opening of the eighteenth century, Marlborough perfected the coordination of horse and foot in his campaigns against Louis XIV's army. In essence, his cavalry squadrons were light horse, wearing a breastplate and armed with pistols and sword or, like the mid-century petronels, carrying a carbine. Contrary to normal practice, Marlborough held most of his cavalry in reserve in the centre, making his initial thrust on the wings with a combination of infantry and small, supporting cavalry units. Once this tactic had drawn the enemy wide, he punched a hole through the middle with the weight of his horse. Emphasising the element of shock, Marlborough used the sword as the main offensive weapon.¹⁴

Quality of English warhorses

If changes in cavalry tactics during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries required a different kind of mount from the ones needed at the beginning of the period, they were just as difficult to find among native horses. Most of those available were small and unsuited to the rigours of campaigning. Polidor Vergil, writing in 1511, attributed it to mistreatment when they were young. In 1557, Giovanni Michiel, the Venetian ambassador, noted that whereas the country possessed numerous light cavalry courageous by nature, they were weak and in poor condition.¹⁵ Yorkshire, even after the demise of old monastic studs such as the one at Jervaulx, still bred the best in England, while contemporaries also esteemed the Galloways of Scotland and the hobbies of Ireland.¹⁶ Hobbies, in particular, were valued: they had some Spanish blood in them and, although not large, were well-proportioned with a finely shaped head.¹⁷ These horses, though ideal for skirmishing and harassing enemy formations in the fashion of European light horsemen such as the *genitors* of Spain and the *stradiots* of the Balkans, were not large enough for pitched battles, even in an age of greater cavalry mobility.¹⁸ Nonetheless, by the time that Englishmen fought each other in the Civil Wars of the mid seventeenth century, there were enough serviceable horses in the country to supply the Royalist and Parliamentary armies without recourse to foreign imports.¹⁹

How had this change come about? To a certain extent improvement occurred as a result of developments within the country itself. As more and more people came to appreciate the qualities of the various breeds of horses, and to use them for appropriate jobs, a specialist market grew. This encouraged farmers in horse-breeding areas to pay greater attention to the business and output rose. At a higher level, the Crown, beginning with Henry VIII, took positive steps to improve the quality of the stock. Firstly, he set more exacting standards at his studs.²⁰ Secondly, he encouraged members of the landed elite to follow his example and, as a spur, promoted measures that ensured that they did so. An Act of 1535-36 ordered all owners of parks outside the four northern counties to keep two brood mares at least thirteen hands high. From May 1537 only stallions of at least fourteen hands could cover them. A further Act, passed in 1541-42, enforced owners, according to rank, to keep a certain number of trotting stallions of at least three years old and fourteen hands high.²¹ It achieved some success for, as the French ambassador noted in his letter to his master in 1542, 'all the nobles are now making studs, for which they have great commodity in their great parks and good ground'.²² His successors followed his lead. In 1580, for example, his daughter, Elizabeth I, appointed a high ranking commission, entitled a Special Commission for the Increase and Breed of Horses, with the brief to see that existing statutes were being observed, especially those relating to serviceable horses.²³ Judging from the standard of the horses that appeared at musters (or the excuses of those who had not sent them), much needed to be done. However, as the earl of Huntingdon pointed out in 1588, it was not so much that gentlemen did not possess serviceable horses but rather they did not want to have their liability recorded in a list.²⁴ Indeed, some gentlemen, like Sir George George Resesby, who lived at Thrybergh Hall in the early seventeenth century, were enthusiasts. According to his grandson, Sir John, his pastime 'was sometimes haukes, but his cheefest was his breed of Horses, in which he was very exact'.²⁵

The other aspect of Crown policy was to cross-breed English stock with foreign horses. Once more, Henry VIII deserves credit for introducing the programme in a

systematic way and in his reign imported horses appeared in the country in greater numbers. Some were received by the king as gifts from foreign rulers. Henry and the marquis of Mantua, who had a particularly fine stud, regularly exchanged horses, Henry sending mainly Hobbies and receiving in return Barbs and Ginetes as well as Coursers, though ones that were lighter than the those of the old Neapolitan breed. His two principal studs lay at Tutbury and Malmesbury, where top quality native brood mares were served by imported stallions.²⁶ Foreign horses continued to arrive under his successors. In Elizabeth I's reign, for instance, trade developed with Morocco and although that country's government periodically banned the export of horses, some Barbs did reach England.²⁷ The flow of imports increased after 1616 with the appointment as Master of Horse of the duke of Buckingham, a superb judge of horseflesh. Expressing his gratitude for the work Buckingham had done in improving the quality of his horses, James I declared, 'God thanke the maister of the horse for provyding me such a number of faire usefull horses, fitte for my hande; in a worde I proteste I never was maister of such horses'.²⁸ Many members of the landed elite involved themselves in the business too, maintaining fine studs and importing foreign horses, thereby extending the pool of serviceable horses that could be drawn upon in wartime.²⁹

Imported breeds

Writing in 1565, Thomas Blundeville praised the Spanish Ginete for his lightness, pace and courage on the battlefield, the last trait attested to him by his own company of soldiers.³⁰ Ginetes originated in Andalusia, an area which in the middle ages had come under Moorish rule. With them, the Moors had brought Barbs from North Africa, a breed which in prehistoric times had acquired Spanish blood via the land bridge across the Straits of Gibraltar. Some of the best Ginetes came from the royal stud at Cordoba and Henry VIII received horses from this stud as well as from that of the marquis of Mantua.³¹ Prospero d'Osma's report on the royal studs in 1576 indicated that the queen was keeping a number of Ginete mares at her studs at Malmesbury and Tutbury.³² She was also breeding from Barbs. Though Blundeville characterised them as 'but little horses, he emphasized their speed, endurance and low maintenance costs.³³ In the middle of the seventeenth century, William Cavendish, then 1st. marquis of Newcastle and the king's commander in the North during the First Civil War, thought them

'as Fine a Horse as can be, but somewhat Slender ... Sinewy and Nervous, and hath a clean Strength, is excellently Winded, and good at Length, to Endure great Travel, and very Apt to Learn, and Easie to be drest, being (for the most part) of a good Disposition, excellent Apprehension, Judgement and Memory'.³⁴

At James I's stud at Hampton Court in 1623 all the mares were covered by either Barb or Ginete stallions.³⁵

For the varied horses bred within the Ottoman Empire, notably from the Balkans, Asia Minor and the Middle East, Blundeville based his assessment on classical authors, though he did have personal experience of imports into Italy and England. These, he considered, descended from Grecian horses because they were 'indifferent fayre to the eie, though not very great nor strongly made, yet very light and swyfte in their running and of great courage.³⁶ He did not mention Arabian horses as such, though Morgan, writing in the 1620, did. To him, Arabian horses represented the epitome of equine beauty and prowess, possessing

'wonderfull courage, swiftenesse and strength'. Slender and of a reasonable height, they were 'so delicately knit together, in euery ioynt and member, and so sinowyd and strong, and therewithall so light and nimble, that not any other horse can boast of more agility or swiftness'.³⁷

In fact, stamina rather than blazing speed, was their defining trait, built in as a result of centuries of selective breeding designed to produce mounts for long distance travel and raiding.³⁸

Although these breeds differed in various ways, they shared common characteristics that made them suitable horses for cavalymen to deploy the evolving principles of mounted warfare. As Claudio Corte emphasized in 1584, ‘A horse for the warre, ought to be a swifte and sure runner, a good eater, light vpon the hand, strong, nimble and valiant, without fault or imperfection’.³⁹ Firstly, at 14½ to 15 hands they tended to be of medium size and therefore less cumbersome than the so-called great horses, as exemplified by the old Neapolitan Coursers. Arguing the value of Spanish Ginetes as stallions from which to breed *manège* horses and, by extension, cavalry mounts, William Cavendish, then duke of Newcastle, stated: ‘so the Spanish Horse is in the Middle, (where Vertue lyes) neither too Gross, nor too Slender ...’⁴⁰ If the *manège* ‘airs’ they learned were of debatable value on the battlefield, their greater responsiveness to the rider would have been an asset. In general, too, the size and light build of these breeds made them nimble and more mobile, especially as they were not weighed down by heavily armoured men-at-war. Mounted pistoleers performing the caracole clearly benefited from the greater agility of their mounts as they trotted forward to fire or wheeled away, but charging cavalymen could also manoeuvre more effectively on nimbler horses as they engaged the enemy. If the speed of these horses accelerated the pace of the charge, it was controlled speed for not even Prince Rupert ordered his cavalry to attack flat-out. These breeds also possessed valuable inner qualities: boldness and courage, according to Blundeville, and intelligence, according to Cavendish.⁴¹

Dissemination of Eastern blood

As noted above, the key to the Crown’s policy of improving the stock of serviceable horses in the country was to involve the landed elite in the process. Writers also promoted the cause. In 1639 de Grey pointed out that good, able and serviceable horses could be bred as easily as ‘Iades and Baffles, unusefull and unprofitable’. All that was needed was the inclination and certain basic facilities.⁴² Enthusiasts formed breeding circles, passing horses amongst themselves and loaning out their stallions to service each other’s mares. They imparted their knowledge to others as well and in this way improved standards within their family and among their friends, neighbours and associates.⁴³ They might also allow their tenants the use of their stallions or sell horses surplus to requirements privately or at markets or fairs. Gradually, the improvements worked their way through to the horses kept by a wider section of the population, and although the process was by no means completed by the end of the seventeenth century, the pool of serviceable horses had grown considerably.⁴⁴

At the opening of the seventeenth century royal studs contained many pure – and cross-bred Ginetes and Barbs and some elite breeders must have possessed them too. However, little documentation exists for their presence there at the time. By April 1599 Thomas Arundel’s father had given Sir Robert Cecil, Elizabeth’s Secretary of State, a little Turk. In 1600, Lord Willoughby offered him a young Ginete for his stud and a year later John Bankes, writing from Dieppe, asked him if he would prefer a Courser or a Barb for a stallion. In 1609 Lord Cranborne, Sir Robert’s son, together with Sir Thomas Howard and Sir John Sheffield, obtained Barbs at Marseilles.⁴⁵ Evidence from Sir Richard Cholmeley’s estate at Brandsby, located in the North Riding, the foremost region of the country for breeding fine saddle horses, suggests that over the course of the early seventeenth century these horses had spread beyond the court circle. His stallion was a Turk and he also possessed a Polish mare. In May 1615 Sir Thomas Bellassis’s Barb covered his black mare, while in July 1617 and July 1619 Sir Thomas Fairfax’s old Barb respectively covered his Grissel Evers Mare and Denny Mare.⁴⁶ Sir Richard’s tenants also benefited from his stud either through purchase or the services of his stallion. In October 1613, for instance, Francis Baker bought a foal sired by his Turk. On 5 May 1617 William Young gave him a yearling gelt colt, which his master’s Turk had sired. As payment, Young received a reduction of £1 5s. in his rent and the use of his landlord’s Turk again. On 27 March 1621 Thomas Hornby, whom he had just employed as his warrener, sold him a yearling stoned colt, sired by Sir Thomas Fairfax’s young bald Barb.⁴⁷

The Fairfaxes, who regularly used Barbs at their stud at Denton [WRY], belonged to a circle of leading north Midland and Yorkshire breeders. On 24 January 1633/4, for instance, Sir Thomas wrote to William Cavendish, then earl of Newcastle, at Welbeck, asking after the colts he had sent him and which the latter's Barb had sired. Moreover, hearing that Newcastle's stud was 'not so compleate as it hathe beene', he offered him the pick of the fine colts, which Lord Norwich's dun horse had sired.⁴⁸ Like Cholmondeley, Newcastle seems to have allowed his stallions to cover his tenants' mares. In a bid to reduce his rent one of his tenants at Ogle in Northumberland offered Newcastle's agent 'the best colt the Black Barb should get'.⁴⁹ Ironically, the dispersal of the Charles I's horses at his Tutbury stud after his execution in 1649 benefited the country because it accelerated the process of dissemination.⁵⁰

Arabians, on the other hand, remained rare until after the Restoration of 1660. In 1616 John Markham, a merchant, sold an Arabian horse to James I but he was lucky because the Ottoman authorities were loathe to license the export of such an iconic creature and one of strategic importance.⁵¹ In 1620 two Arabian mares were being covered at the king's stud at Malmesbury, one by a Ginete stallion and the other by a Barb. The four other stallions comprised Turcoman, Courser, Ginete and Polish horses.⁵² As pure-bred Arabians had been imported into Poland since 1506, it is likely that this Polish stallion possessed Arabian blood.⁵³ At Tutbury, the king kept an Arabian stallion as well as two Coursers, a Barb, a French horse (probably a Barb) and a Spanish Ginete, again illustrating the practice of selective cross-breeding to improve a stud. As noted above, these Coursers were no longer the ponderous carriers of weight, having been lightened by an infusion of Barb and Ginete blood.⁵⁴ In the 1650s Oliver Cromwell acquired the Dun Arabian, possibly a descendant of the Markham Arabian, when he became Lord Protector. As a keen and knowledgeable horseman he was determined to re-establish the royal studs. He did receive consignments of Coursers and Barbs but almost certainly failed to obtain any Arabians in spite of his best efforts. Possibly the stallion, for which Cromwell dispatched a frigate to Brill, was an Arabian, though, known as Place's Turk after his studmaster, he was probably a Turcoman. However, as horses emanating from anywhere in the Ottoman Empire were often indiscriminately labelled 'Turkish', it is difficult to be sure. Arabians, *per se*, tended to be shipped from Aleppo.⁵⁵

After the Restoration in 1660 the earl of Winchelsea, Charles II's ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, scarcely had better luck. On 24 February 1663 he confidently informed the earl of Lesley, then in Vienna, that he would be able to supply him with Arabians through the English merchants at Aleppo, offering them 300 to 400 crowns a horse. However, it seems as though only one horse materialised. His attempt to buy two more in 1665 apparently failed as well because two years later he was complaining that

'I have not been able to buy one good horse; they are all either at court or going for Candia. I intend to try for some of the Turcoman breed, for I despair of getting any Arabs from Aleppo, where my correspondent cannot even procure any for the king. As soon as I find any, your Excellency shall have the best'.⁵⁶

Even so, through a mixture of patience, diplomacy and subterfuge, agents and emissaries did manage to secure Arabians and dispatch or smuggle them out of the Ottoman domains. As a result, they begin to feature in estate records. In 1666, for instance, the earl of Devonshire possessed an Arabian stallion, a brood mare and a filly, as well as the keeper's old Arabian. He also had a Barb mare.⁵⁷ In 1690-1 the Arabian stallion of George Langton of Langton [Lincs.] was serving mares bred in some of the best studs in the country. In 1690 Richard Newdigate bought an Arabian mare, who was still producing fine foals thirteen years later.⁵⁸

Recreation and war

The country clearly benefited from the interest of the landed elite in horses but in spite of the exhortations of the government, the motives of the upper classes were often personal rather than patriotic. As Corte observed in 1584,

‘And surelie, albeit in this hir Maiesties most prosperous and peaceable reigne, the gentlemen of this land haue studied to make horses more for pleasure than seruice yet who so shall truly consider to what end horsemanship tendeth, must needs knowe that the principall vse of horses is to trauell by the waie & serue in the war: whatsoever your horse learneth more, is rather to pompe or pleasure, than honor or vse’.⁵⁹

For members of the upper classes horses were valued for what they represented as well as for what they could do.⁶⁰ Good horsemanship virtually defined a gentleman and to be seen in public controlling a fine, well-proportioned steed, especially one of an exotic foreign breed, not only reflected the rider’s status but also validated his political authority. Thus, the sleek lines, the nobility and the power and pace of Arabians, Barbs, Turcomans and Ginetes enhanced their iconic appeal on the road and incidentally improved the performance of the cavalry on the battlefield. It was, indeed, fortunate that the national interest coincided with the dictates of fashion and status.⁶¹ So, when civil war broke out in England in 1642 both sides could draw on a plentiful pool of serviceable horses. On 6 June 1642 Parliament issued the ‘Propositions’, asking people to contribute money and plate, or to equip and maintain the cavalry with horses and arms. By the end of September the commissioners had received 3,014 horses, mainly from London and eight counties lying in the Home Counties, East Anglia and the South Midlands. With added pressure the number had more than doubled (6,704 horses) by 6 July 1643.⁶² Contributions included very expensive horses such as the four bay stallions, valued at £120, that Sir Thomas Martin sent in on 2 January 1642/3.⁶³ Although horses earmarked for ordinary troopers were priced much lower, the county lists indicate that the country possessed thousands of serviceable horses in 1642. Later in June 1642 the Royalists, through the Engagement, instigated a similar scheme. Forty-four lords and officials signed an agreement, whereby they promised to maintain 2,015 horses for three months.⁶⁴

While some of the horses had served in the county militia, as, for example, the bay trained horse, completely furnished and valued at £16, sent in by Sir John Gerrard at Wheathamstead in Hertfordshire in 1644⁶⁵, many were clearly untrained saddle mounts. As Henry Oxinden of Deane wryly observed to his cousin, Henry Oxinden of Barham, on 27 January 1641/2, ‘I am glad you have got a horse; provide you of Armes; it is Mars, nott Venus, that now can helpe’.⁶⁶ In summer 1643 Charles Staynings, writing from Holnicote in Somerset, apologized for the delay in sending a soldier and horse to serve in the king’s army. Apart from the rider being ill-equipped, the horse was not adequately prepared. As he feared that the animal would ride ‘hot’ and would disrupt the troop, he offered to replace him with a more suitable horse.⁶⁷ If suitable saddle horses could be readily diverted to military use, more problematic was the pressing into service of brood mares and with it the consequent loss of potential, if not actual, replacements should the war be prolonged beyond Christmas 1642. Thus, on 19 June 1642 Sir Edward Verney told his steward ‘When my mare Lea hath foaled, let the foale bee knockt on the head, & the mare taken to Howse, for I cannot spare her this summer ... There will be a press shortly in the country’.⁶⁸ Fortunately, the equine resources of the country were sufficient to meet the demand, although, inevitably, local shortages did occur from time to time.⁶⁹ Even after three years of war (and even more in Scotland and Ireland) five Smithfield dealers were able to supply the Parliamentary New Model Army with 7,801 horses between April 1645 and August 1646.⁷⁰

In spite of the losses caused by the Civil Wars numbers recovered quickly in the 1650s to the extent that export restrictions were lifted on 1 January 1657.⁷¹ Building on a firm base, the quality of the country’s saddle horses improved exponentially in the late seventeenth century partly as a result of the continuing importation of foreign horses and partly due to a more systematic approach to breeding. In 1686 Richard Blome claimed that,

‘In England several good breeds; our running horses, hunters and pads, and our horses for all manner of fatigue of whatsoever nature, are not matched in Europe;

nor is any horse better for an officer in war, than one of our *Twelve-stone horses* (such as usually run for plates) if he is well-chosen and taken in time'.⁷²

While horses for these various pursuits had their distinctive characteristics, genetically they had much in common. Hunters, for instance, benefited from the admixture of eastern blood. Hunting, itself widely regarded as good training for war, had long been the most popular sport of the landed elite. By the end of the seventeenth century it had undergone changes that in a way mirrored those in mounted warfare, as hunting the deer through woodland was giving way to chasing foxes across a more open landscape. Partly this was due to the loss of the deer's natural habitat as the enclosure of woodland, heaths and moors continued apace, but more positively it reflected interest in fox-hunting itself. As the countryside opened up, foxes were able to display their natural pace and hounds had to follow a scent at speed to keep up. Fox-hunting therefore offered the prospect of an exhilarating chase but only if the riders were mounted on horses with the necessary speed-endurance capability.⁷³

At this point, breeding pacey hunters intersected with the other major elite sporting activity of the seventeenth century, namely, horse racing. Over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the sport had grown steadily but from 1660 under the patronage of Charles II its popularity among the elite soared. By then, many racehorses possessed Eastern genes, mainly derived from Barbs, though with some Turcoman blood as well. An early infusion occurred when Henry VIII housed a gift of four Barb brood mares from Federico, the marquis of Mantua, in 1532 in his racing stables at Greenwich, where they were looked after by Powle, the riding master and Keeper of the Barra or Barbary Horses, and Thomas Ogle, the Gentleman Rider of the Stables. Subsequent racing managers, working under the Master of the Horse, notably the duke of Buckingham, continued to breed from Barbs.⁷⁴

However, one should not ignore the contribution of native horses in the make-up of the racehorses of the time and, by extension, in that of the thoroughbred. In 1607 Gervase Markham claimed that the swiftest horses were bred in England. To prove the point he recalled watching the best Barbs when they were in their prime, specifically referring to a match at Salisbury where they were beaten by Mr. Carlton's black hobby. Even the marquis of Mantua prized hobbies for their sheer sprinting speed yet, as Markham added, Mr. Carlton's hobby then lost a race to Mr. Blackstone's Valentine, a plain bred English horse both through his sire and dam.⁷⁵ He had probably been bred in the North, a region where horse racing had become well-established by 1600. Elite breeders there recognised the pace of their local horses and began putting proven native mares to eastern stallions. A potent combination, it gave the emergent thoroughbred of the late seventeenth century its sublime speed-endurance qualities.⁷⁶

As prestige as well as large sums of money depended upon the outcome of a race, owners were more concerned with performance than with appearance, a novel concept for the elite. Using the racecourse test as a guide, they bred from winners and began systematically to record the genealogy of their horses to guide them in their choice of sire and dam. Blome made this point in 1686.

The excellent Breeds of Running Horses that we have in England ... might be very advantageous to the Kingdom ... By having Plates run for at several times, & in several Counties, we come to know exactly the Speed, Wind, Force, & Heart of every Horse that runs, which directs us infallibly in our choice when we have a mind to furnish our selves for the War, Hunting, Breeding, the Road, & the like; whereas if we could see no such Trial made, we must stand more to our hazards, & should not be so sure to meet with good ones.⁷⁷

In effect, it was possible over time to tailor horses to fit the specific purpose required. Thus, to improve the speed-endurance capabilities of hunters, they were crossed with racehorses. It made economic sense too. As maintaining a racing establishment was very expensive, owners sought to maximise the return on their investment by offering stud facilities to all who could pay for the service. Many subscribed, perhaps to improve the quality of their saddle mounts in general but also specifically to obtain

speedy hunters. Even the three foundation stallions sired far more hunters than racehorses.⁷⁸ Owners of stallions with fine pedigrees even advertised their horse's services. Thus, Thomas Chamberlain of Trentham's advert in the Stamford Mercury on 13 March 1717/8 proclaimed the qualities of his horse, Chestnut Darcey,⁷⁹

‘a strong well bred Stallion ... with a fine Blaze in his Face, and two white Heels, fourteen Hands and three Inches high, able to carry Sixteen Stone a Fox-hunting, got by Mr Lister's famous Turk (which got Brisk) and out of a Darcey Royal Mare, bred by Mr Pelham the Top-breeder of Lincolnshire, the Price is one Guinea a Leap for my self, and one Shilling for my Man.’

Horse racing itself helped meet the need by putting on races for hunters. In 1739 Cheny recorded twenty-three designated races, half of them at twelve or thirteen stone, scattered among at least thirteen counties.⁸⁰ As a result, the number of pacey but strong hunters increased in the hundred years after the Restoration.

If improved hunters benefited sportsmen, the country gained from a larger stock of cavalry mounts who allied strength with speed and mobility (and from the development of saddles that enabled troopers to charge over rough terrain at pace). Indeed, military requirements lay behind the establishment of valuable plate races, which stipulated weights of twelve stones or above, as Richard Blome indicated. A new fourteen stone plate (worth £100), introduced at Newmarket in October 1699, made the connection clear, the stated objective being ‘to encourage the breeding of strong and useful horses’. Horses that had won prizes worth more than £20 could not enter.⁸¹ This was a typical format, one designed to augment the number of serviceable horses by promoting interest in the events. As the season progressed, successful horses found themselves increasingly barred from competing, thereby opening up opportunities for those coming behind them. The system therefore moved some horses up the ladder and allowed others onto the bottom rung. It therefore ensured a constant turnover of entrants and a growing pool of serviceable horses which the country could draw upon. Apart from selling plates, where the founder had first refusal, contributors had the chance of buying the winning horse, often on the throw of a dice. These events therefore contributed to spreading the blood of winning horses more widely and in doing so helped to improve the breeding stock.

Conclusion

In the early sixteenth century Henry VIII's wars showed up the inadequacy of native horses as suitable mounts for the heavy cavalry. The best were Neapolitan Coursers and although the king and his courtiers possessed some, mostly they had to be imported or acquired on the continent when fighting abroad. Moreover, even if the country could draw on a large pool of horses for the light cavalry, they were generally too weak to endure the rigours of a military campaign. Even when developments in the conduct of war rendered the heavy cavalry obsolete, the nation's horses lacked the strength and stamina needed for pitched battles. Henry VIII recognised the problem and to stimulate the breeding of serviceable horses, instigated a series of reforms designed to improve breeding practices. He also imported stallions and brood mares which would infuse the native stock with added strength, while also improving their speed-endurance and mobility. His successors continued his policy, the general sequence moving from Spanish Ginetes, through north African Barbs and Ottoman Turcomans to Middle Eastern Arabians. Crucial to the success of the policy was the involvement of the landed elite, who were prodded into breeding suitable horses on their estates by a mixture of compulsion and encouragement. Fortunately for the country, the Crown's concern for the supply of serviceable warhorses coincided with upper class interest in the iconic appeal of riding fine horses and employing them in fashionable equine pursuits such as hunting, hawking and racing. In particular, hunters gained added speed and endurance by the admixture of racehorse blood, which, as a by-product, made them into ideal cavalry mounts.

Estate accounts reveal that many members of the landed elite bred fine horses on their estates and some of them were enthusiasts. They also helped to improve the

quality of the nation's stock of horses by facilitating the dissemination of the blood of these superior animals among the horse-breeding population as a whole. Their stallions covered the mares of their tenants and they sold them surplus foals or superannuated horses. They also disposed of them at markets and fairs. As a result of cross-breeding the nation's equine resources were far better in 1600 than they had been a century earlier. Indeed, when demand soared in the civil wars of the 1640s Englishmen had no need to import horses from abroad to supply them with a sufficiency of serviceable mounts. Moreover, within a decade the government was so confident of home supplies that it licensed the export of horses. The situation further improved after the Restoration of 1660 as more horses came in from abroad, adding to those already stabled in the country. As Blome noted in 1686, cross-breeding had produced a pool of saddle horses suited for all purposes. If the thoroughbred is the supreme example of this process of hybridisation, we should not forget its impact on the provision of good quality saddle mounts for the cavalry. Eastern and north African blood was crucial in the mix.

NOTES

- ¹ L.A. DiMarco, *War Horse* (Yardley PA, 2008) pp. 153-6.
- ² F. Kitson, *Prince Rupert, portrait of a soldier* (London, 1994) p. 263.
- ³ P. Edwards, *Horse and man in early modern England* (London, 2007) p. 169.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- ⁵ *C[alendar of] S[tate] P[apers] D[omestic], Addenda, 1566-79*, pp. 121, 123.
- ⁶ C. Falls, *Elizabeth's Irish wars* (London, 1996) p. 39.
- ⁷ A serviceable horse was one of sufficient size and strength to serve as a cavalry mount.
- ⁸ L. Boynton, *The Elizabethan militia 1558-1638* (London, 1967) p. 84; 'Order for the mustering of demi-lances and light horsemen on Mousehold near Magdalen Chapel, 1584', *Norfolk Archaeology*, I (1849) pp.21-2; C.H. Firth, *Cromwell's army: a history of the English soldier during the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate* (London, 1962) p. 111; Boynton, *Elizabethan militia*, pp. 87-8; T[he] N[ational] A[rchives], WO 49/20, f. 119, WO49/26, f. 80.
- ⁹ *H[istorical] M[anuscripts] C[ommission]*, Salisbury MSS, XXII (London, 1971) pp. 142-3.
- ¹⁰ R.W. Stewart, 'War and government in the Channel and beyond', in M.C. Fissel, ed., *War and government in Britain, 1598-1650* (Manchester, 1991) p. 113.
- ¹¹ DiMarco, *War Horse*, p. 152; P. Edwards, *Dealing in death: the arms trade and the British Civil Wars, 1638-52* (Stroud, 2000) pp. 6, 13. A corslet comprised a back- and breast-plate, proofed to withstand pistol fire.
- ¹² Bodleian Library, Carte MS 3, f.603.
- ¹³ *Edwards, Horse and man*, p. 177.
- ¹⁴ D. Chandler, *The art of warfare in the age of Marlborough* (London, 1976) pp. 71-2, 91.
- ¹⁵ *CSPV[enetian], II, 1509-19*, p. 51; *CSPV, VI, iii, 1557-8*, appendix, pp. 1672, 1049.
- ¹⁶ J. Thirsk, *Horses in early modern England: for service, for pleasure, for power* (Reading, 1978) p. 11; P. Edwards, *The horse trade of Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1988) pp. 41-2
- ¹⁷ *Edwards, Horse and man*, p. 5.
- ¹⁸ T. Arnold, *The Renaissance at war* (London, 2001) p. 97.
- ¹⁹ P. Edwards, 'The supply of horses to the parliamentary and royalist armies in the English Civil War', *Historical Research*, LXVIII, no. 165 (Feb. 1995) pp. 49-66.
- ²⁰ Society of Antiquaries MS 129; *Edwards, Horse and man*, p. 8.

- ²¹ 27 Henry VIII. c. 6; 33 Henry VIII, c. 5.
- ²² *L[etters] & P[apers of] Henry VIII, 1542*, p. 80.
- ²³ TNA, SP 12/137/17; SP 12/143/26; Thirsk, pp. 15-16.
- ²⁴ *CSPD, Addenda, 1580-1625*, p. 250.
- ²⁵ B[ritish] L[ibrary], Harleian MS 29443, f. 3v.
- ²⁶ Society of Antiquaries MS 129; C.M. Prior, *The royal studs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1935) *passim*.
- ²⁷ T.S. Willan, *Studies in Elizabethan trade* (Manchester, 1959) p. 299.
- ²⁸ Prior, *Royal studs*, p. 74.
- ²⁹ P. Edwards, 'Upper class perceptions of the horse', in P. Edwards, A.E. Enekel & E. Graham, *The horse as cultural icon* (Brill, 2012) pp. 287-9, 291, 293; P. Edwards, *Horse and man*, pp. 8-9.
- ³⁰ T. Blundeville, *Fower Chiefyest Offices Belonging to Horsemanship* (London, William Seres: 1565) ff. 8r-8v.
- ³¹ A. Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse* (Stroud, 1994) pp. 55-57; S. Loch, *The royal horse of Europe* (London, 1999) p. 75; D.M. Goodall, *The history of horse breeding* (London, 1977) pp. 161, 163; *CSPV, II, 1509-19*, p. 198.
- ³² Prior, *Royal studs*, pp. 11-21.
- ³³ Blundeville, ff. 17r-17v.
- ³⁴ William Cavendish, *A new method and extraordinary invention to dress horses* (London, Thomas Milbourn: 1667) p. 53.
- ³⁵ Prior, *Royal studs*, pp.41-2.
- ³⁶ Blundeville, ff. 5v-6v.
- ³⁷ Nicholas Morgan, *The horse-mans honour* (London, 1609) p. 5.
- ³⁸ A. Mackay-Smith, *Speed and the thoroughbred* (Lanham MD, 2000) p. 98.
- ³⁹ Claudio Corte, *The Art of Riding* (London, H. Denham: 1584) p.95.
- ⁴⁰ Cavendish, 89.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49-50, 53.
- ⁴² Edwards, *Horse and man*, p.9; Thomas de Grey, *The compleat horseman and expert ferrier*, I (London, Thomas Harper: 1639) pp.1-2.
- ⁴³ P. Edwards, *Horse trade*, p. 43; P. Edwards, *Horse and man*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁴ P. Edwards, *Horse trade*, p. 45.
- ⁴⁵ *HMC Marquis of Salisbury MSS IX* (London, 1902) p.130; *X* (London, 1904) p.14; *XIV* (London, 1923) p.177; *HMC, Duke of Rutland MSS, I* (London, 1888) p. 421.
- ⁴⁶ M.Y. Ashcroft, ed., The memorandum book of Richard Cholmeley of Brandsby, 1602-1623, *North Yorkshire R.O. Publications*, no. 44 (1988) pp. 70, 95, 116, 141, 174.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 138, 218.
- ⁴⁸ BL, Add MS 70499, f. 170.
- ⁴⁹ Prior, *Royal studs*, p.56.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ⁵¹ Mackay-Smith, p. 96.
- ⁵² Prior, *Royal studs*, pp. 66-8.
- ⁵³ A. Hyland, *The warhorse in the modern era, breeder to battlefield: 1600 to 1865* (Stockton-on-Tees, 2009) p. 18.
- ⁵⁴ Prior, *Royal studs*, p. 77.
- ⁵⁵ P. Little, 'Uncovering a protectoral stud: horses and horse-breeding at the court of Oliver Cromwell, 1653-8', *Historical Research*, 82, no. 216 (2009) pp. 252-67; Prior, *Royal studs*, pp. 79-81.

- ⁵⁶ HMC, MSS of A.G. Finch esq of Burley-on-the-Hill, Rutland, I (London, 1915) pp. 134, 242, 266, 271, 288, 290, 369, 458.
- ⁵⁷ Chatsworth Archives, Stable Accounts 1666-9 H37/1, 2, 9.
- ⁵⁸ Lincolnshire A.O., Massingberd of Gunby MSS: MASS 28/1, diary of George Langton; Warwicks. R.O.; Newdigate MS CR 136/V/138, 142.
- ⁵⁹ T. Bedingfield, ed., Claudio Corte's *The art of riding* (London, H. Denham: 1584) Aii, v.
- ⁶⁰ Edwards, 'Upper class perceptions', p. 293.
- ⁶¹ Edwards, *Horse and man*, pp. 27-32
- ⁶² G. Robinson, *Horses, people and parliament in the English Civil War* (Farnham, 2012) p. 56; Edwards, *Dealing in death*, p. 159.
- ⁶³ TNA, SP 28/144.
- ⁶⁴ Edwards, *Dealing in death*, p. 159.
- ⁶⁵ TNA, SP28/130, ii, f.14r.
- ⁶⁶ D. Gardiner, ed., *The Oxinden letters 1607-1642* (London, 1933) p. 272.
- ⁶⁷ Sir W.C. & C.E. Trevelyan, eds. Trevelyan Papers, III, *Camden Society*, CV (1872) p.238.
- ⁶⁸ Lady F.P. Verney, ed., *Memoirs of the Verney Family during the Civil War* (London, 1970) p. 92.
- ⁶⁹ Edwards, *Dealing in death*, pp. 173-4.
- ⁷⁰ Edwards, *Dealing in death*, pp. 162-3.
- ⁷¹ Edwards, *Horse trade*, p. 143.
- ⁷² Richard Blome, *The gentlemans recreation* (London, 1686) part 2, p. 2; Edwards, *Horse and man*, p. 7.
- ⁷³ Edwards, *Horse and man*, pp. 122-4.
- ⁷⁴ A. Tonni, 'The Renaissance studs of the Gonzagas of Mantua', in Edwards *et al*, *Icon*, pp.275-6.
- ⁷⁵ Edwards, *Horse and man*, 112; Mackay-Smith, pp. 67, 69; Gervase Markham, *Cavelarice* (London, Edward Allde:1607) pp. 9-10.
- ⁷⁶ Edwards, *Horse and man*, pp. 112-4.
- ⁷⁷ Blome, part 2, p. 8.
- ⁷⁸ Edwards, *Horse and man*, p. 123.
- ⁷⁹ *Stamford Mercury*, 13 March 1717/8.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.