

HISTORY'S ODD SHORTS

A FAMOUS RUN

Colonel J. Anstruther-Thomson (known to his friends as “Jack” Thomson), of Charleston, Fife, a renowned foxhunter, died on Saturday morning in his 87th year. He was master of the Atherstone foxhounds, and afterwards became master of the famous Pytchley pack. Whyte Melville, the poet and historian of the chase, has devoted many papers to the doings of the late Colonel. For a period of 15 years the Colonel was master of the Fife foxhounds. The “Daily Telegraph” says: Soon after Colonel Thomson’s mastership began the Pytchley huntsman, Charles Payne, entered the late Sir Watkin Williams Wynn’s service, and Colonel Thomson hunted the Pytchley himself.

Then from 1864 to 1869 there followed five years of extraordinary sport, culminating in the Waterloo Gorse run, which took place on the day of the Market Harborough Hunt Ball, February 2, 1866.

They met at Arthingworth, and about two p.m. found their first fox (it was believed that in the course of a run which lasted three hours and forty-five minutes they changed their fox two or three times) in Waterloo Gorse.

Jack Thomson began on the back of Valeria, from which he changed to Usurper, lent to him by Dick Roake the first whip, then to a horse belonging to Mr. William Hay, then to another owned by Mr De Winton, and, finally, at the nick of time his best hunter, Rainbow, turned up. Among the famous lot of horses that carried the hard-riding Master of the Pytchley in 1866, and which Valeria, Iris, Borderer Harold, Man of the Age, Wanderer, and Hypothec, the best was undoubtedly Rainbow. He was a magnificent dark brown horse, shewing a deal of blood, standing 16.2, and as bold as a lion.

The first hour of this memorable run was across the finest line of country in the “flying Shires,” and, in the words of Harry Custance, “We went by Clipstone, Farndon, Oxenden, and Lubbenham to Bowden Inn, about nine miles of grass, and over every sort of fence. I don’t know how many ox-fences I jumped that day, but more than I should care to jump now, even on the back of that chestnut mare, who was one of the biggest jumpers I ever rode. It was before wire – that greatest of all curses – had come in. Captain Olliver, who lived at



Oxenden, told me that he measured one place on his farm – an oxer – that my mare jumped, and it was 33ft. from taking off to landing.” How many falls Colonel Anstruther-Thomson encountered in those trying three and three quarter hours has never been clearly substantiated but at last light and scent failed, and the end came none too soon, but without bringing death to the fox.

Colonel Thomson and his tired hounds were eighteen miles away from the kennels at Brixworth, and did not get home till ten p.m., when the Master ate a hasty dinner, put on his evening clothes, and set off for Market Harborough, a distance of twelve miles. It was half an hour after midnight when he entered the ballroom, and to his dying hour the extraordinary outburst of cheers which greeted his appearance could never have faded from his memory, or been recalled without a glow of enthusiasm. It was a peculiarly English scene – one that no other country save our own could have exhibited, and evil will be the day for England when such exceptional runs as that from Waterloo Gorse, and such pluck and endurance as were shewn that day by one of the finest heavy-weight riders that ever crossed a country, shall cease to be held in honour.

*The Chester Courant and Advertiser for North Wales,
12th October, 1904*