

The Achievement of Lord Lyon

Kay Sanderson

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the greatest triumph in the history of racing in East Ilsley. (So far ...)

In 1866 James Dover sent out Lord Lyon from Church Hill Stables to win the Triple Crown. The English Triple Crown comprises three Classic races: the 2,000 Guineas run at Newmarket, the Epsom Derby, and the St Leger which is the oldest of the Classic races, run in September at Doncaster. Only 15 horses have ever won the Triple Crown, the most recent being Nijinsky in 1970.

James Dover was born in Birmingham in 1825 and learned his trade in Hednesford in Staffordshire, working his way up from groom to head lad to trainer. He trained in East Ilsley from 1862 until his death in 1888. Among his principal owners were Lord Rosebery, Sir Richard Sutton of Benham Place near Newbury, and General Thomas Hooke Pearson.

General Pearson bred Lord Lyon and his full sister Achievement by Stockwell out of Paradigm at his stud in Northamptonshire. He gave them both names with a heraldic theme: *Lord Lyon King of Arms* is the heraldic authority for Scotland, responsible for the granting of arms, clan tartans and other ceremonial matters. *Achievement* is the formal term for what is commonly called a coat of arms, including not just the shield but all additional heraldic features such as supporters, crest and motto.

In the autumn of 1864 the yearling Lord Lyon was walked the seventeen miles from Oxford to Ilsley by Dover's head lad, Charles Gregory. Soon afterwards he showed promise by finishing a short head behind an older horse in a trial gallop. It was decided that he would be leased to the General's friend Richard Sutton for his racing career, and so it was Sutton's black and red colours that he carried to victory.



Lord Lyon

Achievement
(images courtesy of intaglio-fine-art.com)



Unbeaten as a two-year-old, Lord Lyon was among the winter favourites for the Derby. His first race of the season was the 2,000 Guineas on 17th April. Lord Lyon's regular jockey, Harry Custance, was injured and unable to ride him in the 2,000 Guineas. In

a remarkable demonstration of trust, Dover (who had a reputation for treating his staff well) gave the ride to R. Thomas, Lord Lyon's stable lad, who rode a clever race to bring the odds-on favourite home to win by a length. With Custance back in the saddle for the Derby a month later, Lord Lyon again started odds-on, and responding to a patient ride caught the leader, Savernake, to win by a head. The result was repeated in September in the St Leger, when the same two horses disputed the lead in an exciting finish, Lord Lyon eventually winning again by a head, without Custance resorting to the whip. And so the Triple Crown was won.

Meanwhile Achievement, Lord Lyon's full sister, was doing her best to outshine him, winning eleven of her thirteen starts as a two-year-old, and placed second in the others. She was running in the best company, beating the future Derby winner in the Woodcote Stakes and the future 2,000 Guineas winner at the Royal Ascot meeting. As a three-year-old she went on to win the 1,000 Guineas, the Coronation Stakes, the Great Yorkshire Stakes, the St Leger, and the Doncaster Cup, only failing to take the fillies' equivalent of the Triple Crown by a shock defeat in the Oaks, in which she dead-heated for second place.

Lord Lyon was retired to stud after racing for three seasons, having won 17 of his 21 races, one of his few defeats being second in the Doncaster Cup on the day after he won the St Leger. None of his progeny matched his success, but among them were a winner of the Grand Prix de Paris, one of France's most prestigious races, and an Oaks winner. His bloodline lives on. Sadly Achievement died young and did not produce any foals that lived to race.

James Dover was a highly respected and popular man, and when he died, newspapers all over the country published obituaries. He was succeeded by his son, also named James, who trained until 1905 but did not enjoy as much success as his father. Both are buried in St Mary's churchyard.

The stables at Church Hill House, where the O'Gorman family have lived for many years, have recently been demolished and a house built in their place, as close to the plan of the original stables as was possible. Michael and Tina O'Gorman have acquired some beautiful prints depicting Lord Lyon and Achievement which will take pride of place in the new Church Hill Stables.