

ATTENTION: DAVID CLEARY

FROM: IAN CARNABY

SPECIALIST WRITER OF THE YEAR

PIECE 3 (Blog update from 30 September)

CONRAD, DONALD AND ME

September 6 was the day of the Carnaby seller at Brighton and also the day Donald Zec died, though I didn't know it at the time.

Actually, I say the Carnaby seller but there was a mix-up and the race, under a different name, took place on August 23 so I had to settle for a modest non-seller. It was the 25th year I've sponsored, a milestone the pandemic thwarted twelve months ago; I think everyone had a good time.

Interestingly, Jack Ryan won the seller that should have been mine and finished fourth in the non-seller on September 6. He was very backable the first time, especially if you spent an hour or three rummaging through the form and trainer John Ryan's plans. The horse was also engaged at Yarmouth the following day with Tia Phillips (7) down to ride him. Clearly, John thought he'd need to offset the 5lb penalty for winning the seller and it all came to pass, Darragh Keenan riding a powerful finish to keep him in front at Brighton (9/2, not bad) before Jack Ryan finished a fair fourth the following day.

It reminded me of sellers from years and years ago, and it reminded me of R C Sturdy, of course, as many things do. Edward Hide was the first to come up the stands' side at Brighton when the ground turned soft and one day he won easily on Loughborough George. The stewards asked Sturdy about the marked improvement and the trainer said that the horse preferred seaside tracks, probably because of the soil's sandy or chalky base. Clearly taken aback by this when they'd expected the usual nonsense about different ground, different tactics etc, the officials omitted to ask him why, in that case, the horse hadn't been sighted at Yarmouth 24 hours before. Happy, happy days.

During my stint at the the BBC I went to see John Ryan's father Mick at Newmarket as part of a feature on apprentice jockey Conrad Allen, who trains today, as you know. The producer Emily McMahon had noticed that Conrad,

then an unknown 7lb claimer, had pipped the great Lester Piggott in a tight finish, having joined Mick's stable after working in a bank.

“I don't know if he worked in one or robbed one but he can ride a bit”, Mick said. He was a bluff character, an old-school trainer who'd studied under Bernard van Cutsem and was always trying something different. During a quiet spell for the stable he worked out that races were easier to win in Holland, at Duindigt, and recorded a string of victories with horses carrying the 'Boxberger' tag. Some of them were up to contesting British races and ran at Yarmouth and Windsor night meetings. Boxberger Prins may have been the best of them but I forget now.

Mick knew how to train top-class horses as well, including Katies, who won the Irish 1,000 Guineas and the Coronation Stakes for legendary owner Terry Ramsden, who bet in millions and enjoyed rather more than his 15 minutes of fame, as Andy Warhol would have it, before finally hitting the skids and going to jail for financial irregularities in the City. You never hear of Terry now, but he had a minder who politely declined my request, about 20 years ago, for an interview for the magazine the Sports Adviser. It was a pity because I don't engage in telephone interviews and would have taken him to lunch.

Anyway, where was I? Ah yes, Conrad Allen. He's quite a character, too. As a boy he appeared in television advertisements for confectionery of some sort, chocolate bars maybe. He has never forgotten the fact that another interviewer, Brough Scott has been mentioned, had him down as the original Milky Bar Kid, which most people would find quite amusing. Conrad clearly thought more care should have been taken and will still tell you all these years later that he wasn't the Milky Bar Kid.

I don't know where Emily read about the Lester Piggott race but I doubt she dipped into the Sporting Life. The Daily Mirror, perhaps, which had a much higher public profile in those days and some quite famous columnists - Marge Proops and, going back to the Sixties, Sir William Neil Connor, who wrote under the pen name Cassandra. It prided itself on being 'the working man's paper' and my dad, who started out as a Geordie miner, took it every day. But he also took the Daily Express, a broadsheet capable of giving the Daily Mail a better run for its money than it is today. Peter O'Sullivan and Clive Graham,

who doubled up on BBC TV, dominated the racing pages. Peter, long before he was Sir Peter, was a clever writer. The thing was never to have a losing run going on too long, so he had no hesitation in tipping a 1 to 3 shot if necessary. And he used 'Bert at the garage' now and again. Bert would wonder about this and that and Peter would supply the answer. 'As I told Bert at the garage, Lester hasn't made up his mind yet but the word from Newmarket is that he'll be on.....' Peter twice invited me to lunch and I never summoned up the nerve to ask him whether Bert actually existed. It didn't matter, of course. We had this mental picture of a chap in blue overalls, his hands forever oil-stained, working out his days in some Chelsea mews, always delighted to see the great man.

But the writer with the most phenomenal output was unquestionably Donald Zecanovskya, the grandson of a rabbi and one of eleven children born to Russian immigrants who settled in Euston before 1914.

They changed their name to Zec and Donald, who left school at 14, worked as a messenger on the Evening Standard before joining the Mirror 83 years ago. He was unstoppable, realising early on that there is simply no point in holding back, no point in not going for the main story. It was show business that attracted him most and the Mirror was the right paper for him. Just as Emily sussed out bits that might make features, so Donald Zec knew what would get people talking. He had a contact inside Buckingham Palace, a boilerman no less, and was able to tell Mirror readers that Princess Elizabeth's horse-drawn coach on her wedding day in late 1947 would be warmed by aluminium hot water bottles. People care about such things, they pass them on. And it was late November, after all. What sensible person would turn down a few hot water bottles?

Hollywood soon beckoned. In one truly incredible week he interviewed Gary Cooper, Henry Fonda, Humphrey Bogart and Kirk Douglas. 'It wasn't for my pretty face', he smiled. He got close to John and Yoko when most people were mystified by their bed-in for peace at the Hilton hotel in Amsterdam. Sure, they gently took the mickey out of him, but who else was allowed to sit by the side of the bed and who else got all the quotes?

It seems appropriate in this of all weeks, with the new Bond film finally up and running, to mention that producer Barbara Broccoli organised Donald's 100th birthday party in London. He was frail and announced that he would not be making a speech, only to make two. He lasted another two years and died on the day the runners made their way down to the start for the Ian Carnaby Handicap. And I'd think that was absolutely right and proper, truly I would, if only I'd achieved one-hundredth as much in my life as Donald Zec.

ENDS

TO: DAVID CLEARLY

FROM: IAN CARNABY

PIECE 2 (Foreword from the book *The Long Road From Portman Square*)

THIS IS WHERE WE LIVE

There is a moment in the Sam Peckinpah film *Junior Bonner* when the apocryphal rodeo rider, played by Steve McQueen, is confronted by his businessman brother Curley.

Exasperated beyond measure, Curley says: 'I'm working on my first million, you're still working on eight seconds' – this being the time Junior, a veteran by now, needs to stay on the feared Brahma bull when it explodes from the pen.

The parallels with gambling are obvious enough. Junior will never envy Curley, a sharpish land agent who is making the most of the mass migration west to cowboy towns like Prescott, but he will inevitably end up with far less money.

The acceptance of the situation informs my earlier book *Not Minding That It Hurts*, which is a line from *Lawrence of Arabia*, of course. If we distinguish between everyday punters (not a word I like) and committed gamblers, there is no doubt the latter will suffer hurt sometimes. In the pages that follow I've tried to outline how they deal with it and, in my own case, hold down various jobs (some of them for weeks as opposed to years) along the way.

To this end I've used various newspaper and magazine columns written over the last 30 years rather than replicate anything in *Not Minding*. Sometimes I wonder if anything has changed at all. I was recently watching another Steve McQueen film, *The Cincinnati Kid*, and realised I was still transfixed by the way the run of diamonds, from eight to queen, sits on the baize tabletop before Lancey, played by Edward G Robinson, flips over the killer jack for a straight flush.

It's well over 60 years since my parents bought their only child most of the Christmas presents they could afford, only to hear him suggest a game of rummy. The cards fascinated me then and still do now. If I go past a games shop in Soho with various packs in the window, I'll go in and buy a couple, even with no reason to open them in the foreseeable future. Like my mother's best china, which barely saw the light of day, they'll be kept for best.

For a few moments the Kid, with a full house, was looking at a life-changing sum. A long way from Prescott, and even further from Tinseltown, the same is true of my friend Dave Nevison, but more of that later. We lesser gamblers may not come as close but we know the strange, empty feeling that can last an hour, a month, or the time it takes for a sudden burst of nervous energy to propel us back into the world of risk and the company of like-minded souls. Then, while the wheel is spinning, the jack of diamonds is waiting or Hemingway's

bunch of skins is hurtling towards the furlong pole, we're not thinking about anything else, regretting anything else or checking the time. This is where we live.

As Junior says: 'Rodeo time. I gotta get it on down the road.'

ENDS

ATTENTION: DAVID CLEARY

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SPECIALIST WRITER OF THE YEAR

PIECE 1

STILL GLORIOUS AFTER ALL THESE YEARS (Irish Field, July 31)

It rained, the sun shone and then it rained again. At one stage the talk was of heavy ground and the jockeys opting for the stands' side, which happens here sometimes.

And as the afternoon wore on it came to pass, Hollie Doyle leading the field across in the Goodwood Cup like an old hand quietly and calmly teaching youngsters. In fact she is the youngster taking the racing world by storm and leaving no one in any doubt that she is the star in this world of 'hail fellow, well met!' happily with us again now that there are more masks on the ground than around the chin.

Many in the crowd had come to see Stradivarius but, along with many others, he waited for another day, sidestepping the race he has made his own. Doyle made sure there was no anti-climax, sending Trueshan clear in the closing stages and reminding jumps aficionados that Alan King can cut it on the level, as well. The jockey complied with most interview requests but there was the little matter of winning the next two races, as well. Oh to be a fly on the wall in the men's changing rooms!

Trueshan was 6/5 favourite and value was hard to find over a long, showery afternoon. With seven non-runners in the opening Chesterfield Cup, Migration started a barely believable 2/1 following his promising reappearance at Sandown. William Buick, who could win on the proverbial clothes-horse at present, brought him with a perfectly-timed run, and this before the jockeys opted for a pitch closer to the stands' side.

Like Royal Ascot, Goodwood craves foreign involvement and this was a pretty good start, even if winning trainer David Menuisier is a Frenchman plying his trade at nearby Pulborough, where Guy Harwood and Dancing Brave ruled a long time ago. Not as long ago as the mighty Hungarian mare Kincsem. of

course, who won all 54 of her races, including the Goodwood Cup in the 1870s. What a journey that must have been. She had a great sense of timing and indeed of theatre, shuffling off this mortal coil on her 13th birthday. Sadly, many of her descendants bade farewell with the onset of two World Wars. Kincsem was often ridden by Otto Madden's father, Otto himself having been born in Hungary. He was champion jockey here on four occasions and won four of the five Classics, including the Derby on Jeddah in 1898.

Andrew Balding had two runners in the Chesterfield Cup until the weather ruled out Bell Rock. He thus had only a small chance of making inroads into his father Ian's record in the race, which amounted to a remarkable six victories, including two for Mailman in 1984 and 1986. Several buildings at Goodwood have vanished, including the stand where Peter Bromley commentated for BBC Radio. There was room for Peter and the equipment but not for his assistant, responsible for prices, interviews and occasional repartee with afternoon presenter Gloria Hunniford. This particular dogsbody needed Mailman to win in '84 and the 13/2 chance went clear a couple of furlongs out, at which point her main supporter ran down to the next corner of this sadly defunct structure, there to rejoice as Mailman drew even further ahead. £1300 to £200 was a decent bet 37 years ago and might have heralded a bright new dawn, a day for 'starting over'. Might have done.

1961 was quite a year, as well. Psidium won the Derby at 66/1 and wasn't even Harry Wragg's main hope. A man on Epsom Downs was so delighted he couldn't resist telling the bookmaker paying out that he only struck the bet because he's been on a cruiser called Psidium in the war. Many of the men with satchels are blessed with a world-weary sense of humour, accentuated by a creditably rapid response. 'Pity it wasn't the Titanic' lives on in the memory.

1961 was also the year when Hampshire won cricket's county championship for the first time. O tempora, o mores! Everyone wore white and the pyjama-clad frolics of today, not to mention popular songs whose insistent beat and repetitive chorus might weary people 'd'un certain age' (unless their name happened to be Caroline, of course) would have seemed part of a dystopian world they had no great desire to visit.

Hampshire won the title despite losing to Sussex at Hove. Games were played over three days - Saturday, Monday and Tuesday - and in those far-off-days the two skippers, Ted Dexter and Colin Ingleby-Mackenzie, thought nothing of driving to London on the Monday night to see Peggy Lee at the Pigalle, where their host was the raffish Old Etonian and racing man, later to become the Scout on the Daily Express, Charles 'Chubby' Benson. Stanhope Joel told them that his horse, Writ Of Error, had no chance in the last at Goodwood on the following day and that Noel Murless' I Claudius would win. They repaired to a night club and, in those pre-breathalisher times, made their bleary way back to Hove in the small hours.

Dexter knocked off most of the 160 runs required for victory but was out to a shot best described as 'desultory' before running to the groundsman's hut in time for the radio commentary on the 4.45. This was a good example of that line we've come to cherish, 'Mine'll nearly win, you know', because I Claudius nearly did but had no answer when Writ Of Error breezed past to score at 33/1. A vague sensation of anti-climax bordering on despair was not improved by the sight of winning owner Joel beaming at the television cameras.

Ingleby-Mackenzie cried off Hampshire's next fixture with a broken finger and went to Goodwood instead. It was no great surprise that he adored horses because he had the constitution of one. He could follow a night on the tiles with a prize-giving at a local school, the better part of a day's cricket and more revelry in the evening. When I interviewed him twenty years or so ago, he was living in a little house backing on to Lord's cricket ground. He ended his days much as he'd lived them throughout his life. And between the rain and the sun on Tuesday, I thought of him and how he and his riotous gang of talented reprobates would have enjoyed Hollie's success and all the other delights of a season suddenly re-born.

Quite what he'd have made of 'cards only, please' when all he wanted was a stiff gin and tonic and had waved his twenty pound note for minutes on end is another matter. But the strawberries were just as good as in '61 and he and his party, properly dressed for the occasion, would have reminded people cracking on a bit, as we tend to say, that we really ought to seek out Our Man in Havana and Alec Guinness just one more time. Alternatively, if they're thinking of a re-

make we have the hat, we have the coat and few can match our desire to live in the past.

ENDS