

Community News

Where racehorses go to enjoy their retirement

By Henry Bodkin

NOT far from Godalming on the Hascombe Road, a long conifer hedge finally gives way to a pair of lamp-lit pillars that mark the beginning of a private drive flanked by neatly-spaced shrubs and tall trees. At its end lies an elegant complex of faded red brick houses, gardens, fields and agricultural buildings.

The atmosphere is sleepy and calm - staff dressed in outdoor gear move about with a quiet deliberateness. It could almost be an exclusive rehab facility for the rich and famous.

And, in many ways, that's exactly what the Racehorse Sanctuary at Stilemans is.

The sporting life of a thoroughbred racehorse is a tunnel-visioned drama of training, conditioning and competing. Each minute of every day is meticulously planned in order to build maximum stamina and speed in these superstar athletes of the equine world.

Success on the course is everything.

Docile friendliness is no ally when toughing it out in a

desperate finish up the Cheltenham hill, or when switching on the gas to steal a Newmarket sprint by a nose.

These are flighty, highly-strung beasts, hard-wired to race and nothing else.

Which raises the inevitable question: what can they usefully do in their remaining years of life - often more than two decades - after retiring from the sport?

This is where the Racehorse Sanctuary, newly moved to Godalming in August, steps in. "We give them a future," says Graham Oldfield, co-proprietor along with Sue Collins, and a former a lead driver in the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery.

"The idea is that every horse that comes here will be re-trained and then rehomed. Some of the really talented ones go on to a second career in eventing or showjumping, but the majority are re-trained for family hacking."

More than 4,000 horses leave the wider racing industry each year, and with daily training costs of anything up to anything from £30 to £100, owners are anxious to move their horses on once the glimmer of turf glory is

extinguished. "The trouble is many of them are badly sold," said Mr Oldfield, 63.

"You get some stockbroker who doesn't understand horses but wants something for his precious 11-year-old Fiona to ride, so he buys a horse cheaply straight from racing and it ends up pulling her arms out.

"What happens to it then?" Mr Oldfield and his partner Ms Collins, 55, take retired racehorses off their owners' hands, usually, but not always, along with a one-off donation to the charity.

The animals then enter a careful, multi-phase package of assessment, rehabilitation and re-training before a new home and occupation is sought which exactly matches the horse's aptitude and temperament.

Crucially, the horses are re-homed on a permanent lend-basis, meaning the team has the right to inspect the living conditions of their former guests at any stage in their life, and, if necessary, bring them back to Godalming.

"We guarantee their future," he said. "We never relinquish ownership of a horse that comes to us."



Steve Porter SA145027
Graham Oldfield and Sue Collins at the Racehorse Sanctuary near Godalming.

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The re-homing process takes anywhere between three months to two years, though if an appropriate new life cannot be found, the horse stays on at Stilemans.

An animal will only ever be put down if its behaviour poses a danger to itself or the public.

Based formerly in West Sussex, the Sanctuary's new facilities comprise 30 stables set about a picturesque yard, 100 acres of grazing, gallops and space for hacking on a former grass aerodrome.

This provide's an ideal setting for Mr Oldfield, Ms Collins and their small team of five full-time staff to help the former competitors unwind after an existence of pure competition.

Becky Edwards, 30, became interested in the plight of former racehorses after rescuing her own thoroughbred from a poorly-chosen post-racing home ten years ago.

She now works full-time at the sanctuary.

"Going to a family straight after racing just doesn't work," she said. "They need time and space to settle down and get used to people."

The work of the charity has also inspired 40-year-old Heather Markham, from Compton, to down tools eight years into a flourishing career at Savills estate agents to work full time at the yard.

"It's a big change but it's such a good cause," she said. "It's all about the horses."

The Racehorse Sanctuary is the successor venture to an original charity, similar in purpose, started by Mr Oldfield and Sue Collins to look after the '90s steeple-chasing hero Moorcroft Boy.

Third in the 1994 Grand National, he broke his neck the following season in a preparatory contest for the same race, but after a painstaking two-year recovery, came back to triumph in the Scottish Grand National in 1996.

He died at the sanctuary after a long and peaceful retirement last year.

Since that founding equine came into the sanctuary's care, Mr Oldfield's team has looked after hundreds of horses of varying provenance, including Mr Vitality, a Hong Kong-trained sprinter and miler who won more than £6m in prize money, and upon retirement attracted a

crowd of 33,000 fans bidding him goodbye when he left the territory.

His story stands in stark contrast to another of the sanctuary's protégés, Mossy Morning, a mare with a negligible racing record who was rescued from the side of a West Country hill along with four other neglected animals.

After a long process, this 'grand old lady' has now turned the corner and been transformed into 'a very happy and health horse'.

The loving treatment doesn't come cheap, and a lot of effort at the sanctuary goes into drumming up the funds needed to keep it going.

Events such as the Racehorse Sanctuary Charity Race day at Sandown Park coming up on Wednesday September 17 are crucial.

These set-piece initiatives, plus the support of a group of wealthy backers, form the financial lifeline for the tranquil Surrey yard.

It enables its 30 or so veterans of the turf to carry on munching their oats, enjoying their rehab, and gradually coming to terms with a life less kinetic.



100 acres of grazing, gallops and space for these retired racehorses.

GUILDFORD, BURPHAM & MERROW
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● People Records will host the latest in its series of Keeping Folk Alive gigs on Saturday at The Keep, in Castle Street.

Jefferson Hamer visited Guildford last year Anais Mitchell in support of their Child Ballads album.

This week, with Kristin Andreassen, he returns having appeared at the Radio 2 Folk Awards show at the Albert Hall - where they walked away with the prize for best traditional song.

Tickets are available from People Records, in Chapel Street, or from www.wegotickets.com/event/279780.

● The Keep pub will host a presentation about Guildford's draft local plan, and town centre vision document, given to members of Holy Trinity Amenity Group.

Graham Hibbert, chairman of East Guildford Residents Association, will discuss the plan from 7pm on Wednesday September 17.

The consultation closes on September 22 over the plans - which include a dramatic rise in housing in Holy Trinity over the next 20 years, as well as a 50% increase in retail space.

● The Effingham Methodist Church is celebrating 160 years with a series of special events on October 3 and 4.

A flower festival and exhibition will be held on both days between 10am and 4pm at the chapel, with an anniversary dance taking place on October 4 from 7.30pm at the KGV Hall.

Tickets for the dance cost £12.50 and include a fish and chip or chicken supper. Please bring drinks and cutlery. To buy tickets phone 01372457705.

● The next table top sale in Jacobs Well takes place on Saturday September 27.

All your unwanted clothes, toys, houseware and bric-a-brac can be given a good home by booking a table.

The sale takes place from 10.00am to noon at the village hall and refreshments will be available.

To book tables contact Heather on 571285 or email dl.home@ntlworld.com.

● The Sidney Sime Gallery at Worpleston Memorial Hall will be opening its doors to the public this weekend.

As part of the national Heritage Open Days, the gallery will be open today (Friday) from 2pm to 4pm and tomorrow (Saturday) and Sunday from 10am to 4pm.

There will be talks by art conservator Hazel Neill (Saturday) and local artist Tim Dolby (Sunday) afterwards at 2.30pm.

Time, who was for many years a Worpleston resident, was an artist, illustrator, humourist and caricaturist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The gallery features more than 80 hung artworks and hundreds of other sketches and paintings.

● The annual ploughing match and county fair is taking place at Loseley Park on Sunday September 28. It is held from 9am to 5pm, with tickets costing £10 for adults, £5 for children, and those under 5 go for free. To get discounted tickets in advance visit www.surreycountyshow.co.uk or call 01483 890810.

● WATTS Gallery is hosting a free volunteer recruitment morning on Tuesday October 2 from 10am. Those wanting to attend should contact Alex Hutchings, visitor services

manager, by sending an email to visitorservices@wattsgallery.org.uk.

HORSLEY CLANDON, RIPLEY & SHERE
Matt Stradwick
t. 01483 508970
e. rebecca.taylor@trinitymirror.com

● THE Horsley Garden Society will be holding their annual flower show on Saturday September 20 at the West Horsley Village Hall.

It is open for non-members to view between 2-4pm and admission is free. To join the society for just £8 a year, contact Terry Lazenby on terrylazenby@terrylazenby.plus.com.

● THE Ellens Green & Rudgwick Gardening Association autumn show will be held tomorrow (Saturday).

In addition to a display of floral, vegetable, fruit and home fare entries, the Ellens Green Art Group will be exhibiting.

The show will run at Ellens Green Memorial Hall, in Furzen Lane, from 2.30pm.

Tea, coffee and homemade cakes will all be available.

● GODALMING and Cranleigh District NCT (National Childbirth Trust) will host its annual Low Bangs Fireworks and Hallowe'en Party on Sunday October 26.

The fun will start at 4pm, at Broadwater Sports Club, in Guildford Road, Godalming, with a fancy dress competition, baby play area and entertainment by Mr Giant.

There will be a Great Godalming Bake Off and the opportunity to meet the fire brigade.

The fireworks will start at 5.30pm.

There is no need to book in advance and everyone is welcome.

Entrance is £5, by donation, per family.

Parking will be limited.

GODALMING & VILLAGES
Jennifer Morris
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● CATS Protection Guildford and Godalming branch will hold a general knowledge quiz on Friday September 19.

Tickets cost £10 for the event, at the Wilfrid Noyce community centre in Crown Court car park, Godalming, which will start at 7pm.

The ticket price includes a fish supper or veggie burger - which needs to be requested upon booking - and guests are invited to bring their own drinks. Tea will be provided.

The teams will be made up of six to eight people.

To book, call 01483 346839 or email natalie.ross.smith@gmail.com.

● GODALMING Band will bring the town's summer of music to a close at the Phillips Memorial Park on Sunday.

The Godalming Trust concert will begin at 3pm at the bandstand, and is free of charge.

In the case of bad weather the concert will be held in the nearby St Peter and St Paul's parish church.

DORKING, LEATHERHEAD & VILLAGES
Mark Edwards
t. 01483 508905
e. mark.edwards@trinitymirror.com

● DORKING Museum's family activity Saturday this month looks at the changing face of farming in the Dorking area over past centuries.

The event, called Farming around Dorking, takes place on September 20. Families are invited to come along and explore objects from the past and old maps to discover how farming in the area has changed. They will be invited to spot the differences, and there will be sheets to colour in too.

The event takes place from 2pm to 4pm and is ideal for families with children up to the age of ten. There is no need to pre-book.

Families cost £4.50, adults £2, children 5-18 years £1, under 5s free, and museum family membership £20 per annum.

● A CAMPAIGN to cut the amount of litter and dog fouling in local parks was launched in Cobham last week.

The 'Keep Our Neighbourhood and Parks Clean' drive was set up by Elmbridge Borough Council to raise awareness of the issue to pet owners and residents.

People who drop litter and irresponsible dog owners face fines of £75 if caught in the act.

● St Christopher's Church in Hinchley Wood has launched an appeal to raise money for ecological improvements to the church building and site.

The Claygate Lane church is aiming to reduce energy use and its carbon footprint by insulating the roof, introducing low energy LED lighting and optimising the central heating.

To find out more about the initiative visit www.stchristopherschurch.org.uk or call the church office on 020 8398 9095.

COBHAM, DOWNSIDE, MARTYRS GREEN, HESSHAM, OXSHOTT, MOLESEY, WATLON, STONE D'ABERNON
Tom Smartwalle
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● AN antiques and fine art fair will be held at Sandown Park Racecourse in Esher on October 10-12.

The fair features a wide variety of stalls.

Tickets cost from £5. For more information, call 01372 464348.

● KESTRELS and hawks will be swooping around Claremont Landscape Garden in Esher on Saturday September 20.

The National Trust property in Portsmouth Road is holding a Birds of Prey Day featuring a number of static and flying displays throughout the day. Families are encouraged to attend the free show to learn more about the lives of these predators. For more information, call 01372 467806.

WYEBRIDGE, HINCHLEY WOOD, CLAYGATE, THE BIRTONS, ESHER & WESTON GREEN
Charlotte Sobott
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Focus on The Woolpack, Elstead

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You'll be shaken and stirred at special 007 night at Woolpack

THIS month The Woolpack has announced the exciting details of its annual dinner dance, which will take place on Saturday October 11.

This year the theme is James Bond - think cocktails, iconic theme tunes and, of course, a terrific array of characters you may wish to go as.

Tickets are on sale now at a reasonable £30 per person, which include bubbles and canapés on arrival, plus a three-course dinner, live music and dancing.

For more information visit the website, www.woolpackelstead.co.uk/events or call 01252 703106.

This month The Woolpack is also continuing its Surrey Advertiser reader offer, with 20% off food throughout the month when you present this voucher.

The offer is valid for lunch or dinner, Monday to Wednesday and on Sunday evenings.

Each week The Woolpack also holds theme evenings, Thursday is Italian Night,

JAMES BOND NIGHT
SATURDAY 11TH OCTOBER 2014
AT THE WOOLPACK

confidential

with a special menu that changes each week - choose from two courses for £18 or three courses for £20.

Friday is Steak Night, where you can choose your cut of meat from the steak trolley, your sauce of choice and the chefs will cook it to order.

And finally, Saturday is Fish Night - select your fish from the fresh fish trolley, and again, it will be cooked by the Woolpack's chefs just how you like it.

Find out more at www.woolpackelstead.co.uk