

MEMORIES of ALFRED HENRY CLARK and THE SHIRE HORSE SOCIETY

by MARJORIE CLARK

Alfred Henry Clark was born at Moulton Eaugate in the parish of Moulton in South Lincolnshire in 1855. He was a tenant of the Crown and Lord Boston and owner of a grassland farm at Postland, farming in all upwards of 2,000 acres. Of medium height, he was a man of immense energy and alertness but, in spite of the searching expression of the brown eyes, the twinkle that always lurked in their depths betrayed his great sense of humour and quick wit.



A. H. Clark in 1924.
(Photo by Sport & General).

In 1920 on the marriage of their only surviving son, Mr and Mrs Clark left Moulton Eaugate to live at Sutton House, Peterborough. Removing from the actual scene of activity did not in any way lessen his interest in the Shire Stud or the business in which he and his son were now partners. Almost to the time of his death he came at least once a week to tour the farms and the stud with Captain A. H., as the Shire Horse Society listed their names to distinguish between the two A. H. Clark's.

The Shire Horse Society played a large part in the life of A. H. Clark and it is appropriate to give a short sketch of its beginnings in this its centenary year. The English Cart Horse Society was the nucleus of the Shire Horse Society. The change of name took place following a suggestion by Mr Fredric Street that a stud book be formed of the "Shire Breed" of horse. The change came about in February 1884 after much controversy among the members. At an Extraordinary General meeting the proposal to change the name was carried by a large majority and confirmed on March 30th to be The Shire Horse Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

In the work of the Society, of which he became a life member in 1880, A. H. Clark took a full part, serving on four of the standing committees. In judging the London Show nine times his record eclipsed that of any other member. Widely known as a first-rate judge of stock of all kinds, on one occasion when the Hackney judge failed to turn up he was asked to officiate in his place, which he did to everyone's satisfaction. He was also a member of the committee of five to purchase the horses presented as a gift from the Society to the Canadian Government. These horses were exhibited to the public at the London Show in 1923.

With their great strength, bottomless courage and docile temperament, the shire horse fulfilled the demand for a heavy horse for town and farm work; and now on the breed gained its rightful recognition. The Shire Horse Show held by the Society each spring in the Agricultural Hall Islington was the mecca of the shire horse world. The Show did a great deal to improve the quality of the breed and the veterinary inspection of the horses entered reduced the incidence of hereditary disease. In 1899 two horses left the Moulton Eaugate stud for Switzerland having been purchased by the Swiss Government, and in the same year a third was shipped to The Cape. A. H. Clark had also done a large American trade. Mr G. E. Brown was an important customer who had great success with his purchases in the American show ring.

Top breeders now started to hold sales at their studs, the auctioneers being Sexton, Grimwade and Beck. The first sale held by A. H. Clark at Moulton Eaugate was on February 5th 1890. This was a unique occasion and became known as the 'Celebrated' sale. Unique because

it was the first sale of country-wide importance ever held by a tenant farmer. Celebrated for the sight of nine grey mares, seven of which were by Clark's Thumper (2136) and bred by A. H. Clark standing in a row. Each of the nine was of excellent conformation and of similar size and weight. A superb piece of showmanship and, as the *Livestock Journal* of 1897 comments, "a sight those who saw it will not forget". The Thumper mares opened the sale and it is interesting to note that the Duke of Marlborough who was present in person purchased four. One went to H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, one to Lord Ellismere and one to Lord Hothfield. The total amount paid for the seven was £1,241. On that day 51 horses were catalogued for sale, a red letter day in the history of fen agriculture. The total realised for the 51 animals was £6,432.

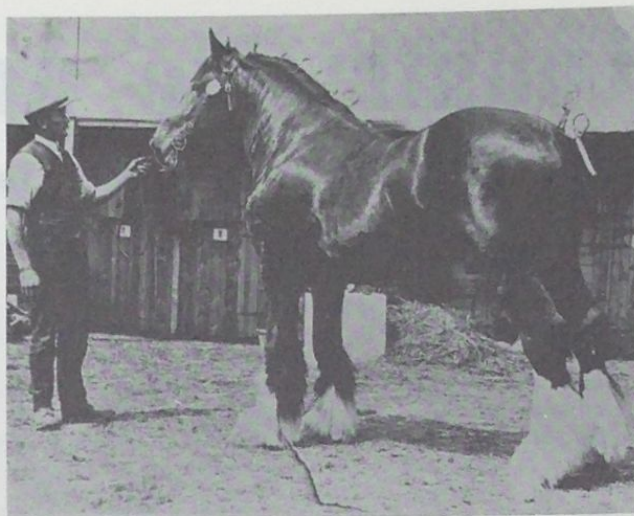
After this initial sale others followed and in 1887 the first combined sale between two life-long friends and farming neighbours, A. H. Clark and F. W. Griffin, was held at Postland. About 800 people sat down to luncheon in the large marquee with the late Sir Albert Muntz presiding. In proposing the health of Mr Clark and Mr Griffin, Sir Albert praised them both for the example they had set to agriculturalists in breeding some of the very best stock at a profit. In reply Mr Clark said that with such men to support them as Sir Albert Muntz he had no fear for the result of the sale. Every animal offered by him was by his own sires and with few exceptions of his own breeding.

Famous stallions owned by A. H. Clark in the 1890s were Thumper, Electric, Extraordinary and Salisbury. In the 1930s father and son owned Moulton Harboro, King's Messenger, Moulton Victor King, Horning Mimic and Up-to-Date. However the stud was even more famous for the mares it produced. The opening sentence from an article in the *Farmer & Stockbreeder* of 28th January 1901 headed "Mr Clark's Shires" is and I quote "If the exhibitors of Shire Horses were asked who is the soundest judge of a shire mare in England, we believe that with one voice they would reply, Alfred Clark". Three mares which swept the board in the show ring were Moulton Messengers Princess at five shows taking 1st prize in every class in which she was entered; Moors Charm and Alsager Peach both at the Royal and both winning in their classes. In 1929 Moors Charm won £82 in prize money and Alsager Peach £61. Peach and Charm were by Moulton Harboro and Messengers Princess by King's Messenger.

From 1880 to 1917 the Spring Show of the Society was held in the Agricultural Hall, but the Hall was then taken over by the military authorities and the Show had to look elsewhere. In 1918 and 1919 the Show, which was restricted to stallions only, was held at Newmarket by the invitation of Messrs Tattersalls to use their Park Paddocks. However, by 1920 it was back in its old venue at the Agricultural Hall.

Following the sad death of Mr John Rowell on 15th March 1922, Mr A. H. Clark was elected President. This appointment was the highest honour the Society could confer and in this case was noteworthy in being the first time a tenant farmer had ever held the office. In 1923 His Majesty the King with Queen Mary, H.R.H. The Duke of York and his fiancée Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon all came to the show. The President filled the position with his usual dignity and charm and it was noted that the Royal party stayed half an hour longer than ever before.

After they had left and Mr Clark joined his family, they asked him what they had talked about to make



Above: A. H. Clark's shire stallion King's Messenger, 1914.

(Photos by Sport & General).

Below: A. H. Clark & Son's shire mare Moulton Messengers Princess, 1st Prize at the Shire Horse Show, 1923.



them all laugh so much. He replied that Her Majesty had asked him if the owners of the gift horses to the Canadian Government had made a good price of their animals. And he had told her that they had all made a fair price, but in the case of the horse they had bought from His Majesty they had given him a nice profit. The Queen laughed and asked the King if he had heard what Mr Clark had told her and he laughed as well and said that he had. When asked by the ladies to tell them about Lady Elizabeth, he said that "she was a nice little thing". He was often reminded of that remark in after years.

The agricultural world of today would be unrecognisable to such a man as Alfred Clark, but one thing he would have rejoiced in would be the recent revival of the Shire, and the continuation of the Shire Horse Society. He lived a full and successful life, and gained the respect of all who knew him. He died at his home at Peterborough, having been a widower for 11 years, on 13th March 1939.

(I am grateful to The British Farmer and Stockbreeder for permission to quote from their journals).