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OR,

*Miscellaneous Tracts*

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## PUBLIC AMUSEMENTS IN NEWCASTLE.

## I. NEWCASTLE RACES.

THE earliest notice of these races is in the year 1632, when we find the following item in the Corporation accounts:—"Paid 20*l.* to John Blakiston, chamberlain, which he disbursed for two silver potts granted by the Common Council, for the race on Killingworth Moor after Whitsuntide."

The following year, 1633, the races appear to have been in a flourishing condition. In a letter from Thomas Bowes, Esq., to Matthew Hutton, Esq., of Marsk, dated June 5th, the former, speaking of his nephew, Sir George Bowes, says, "He is now at Newcastle, and it seems he thinks his money will never have an end, for he is making matches with the lords of the horse-courses, and as we hear, hath made two matches, the one for 40*l.* the other for 100*l.*"

This meeting, with all others of a similar kind, was suppressed in the time of the Commonwealth; which caused Daniel Collingwood, son of Sir Robert Collingwood, of Branton, to say in a public company that "there were none now in power but the rascality, who envied that gentlemen should enjoy their amusements." For this offence he was summoned by the Parliament as a delinquent, June 11th, 1657. The races were revived after the Restoration, being held as before, the week after Whitsuntide. In 1659, they are noticed in the Common Council books, the course being still on Killingworth Moor. In 1707, there is an order in the books that "for the future no cords be used or paid for" at that place.

Mackenzie mentions a *Town Plate*, value 25*l.*, in 1715.

In 1716, there was a *County Plate*, the entry for which is preserved in the *Courant* of that day, and is here given, as the earliest "List of all the Running Horses" for any race at Newcastle.

"Newcastle, May 28th. A list of the names of the owners of the horses, and their riders, that are entered for the County Plate, viz. :—

"Edward Carr, of Whitburn, in the county of Durham, Esq., a bay mare, called Silversnout, James Garth rider, in white.

"Fenwick Bowman, Gent., *alias* Bonner, a bay mare, called Creeping Kate, Fenwick Bowman rider, in white.

eminence, afterwards manager of the Edinburgh company, the manager at the other theatre being Mr. Baker. The competition was continued the following season.

Again, in 1781 and 1782, a rival company was established at "The New Theatre, in the Castle Garth," a temporary building erected at a considerable expense.

In 1786, Messrs. Emery and Cumberland fitted up a theatre at Mr. Methuen's long-room, in Gateshead, for a summer season, commencing in the assize week, when the other theatre was not open. The Moot-hall was at this period, when not required for judicial purposes, let to an auctioneer as a sale-room.

From the above details it will be seen that Mackenzie's statement as to three theatres being open at the same time, is incorrect. He is also in error both as to the date and the situation of the "Great Booth in Usher's Raff-yard," which was erected in 1728, and was at the Head of the Side, not in Queen Street.

The subject of the erection of a new theatre in Newcastle was brought before a meeting convened by advertisement, Dec. 11th, 1784, and 1,125*l.* was subscribed at the time towards an estimated expenditure of 2,000*l.* The whole amount was raised in 25*l.* shares, which were subsequently increased to 30*l.* Another meeting was held at Bella's Coffee House, on the Sandhill, on the 11th of July, when the site and plans were determined on, and the necessary steps were taken to procure a patent, under which the new building in Mosley Street assumed the distinction of a Theatre Royal.

The theatre was not completed for opening till January, 1788, by which time the actual expenditure exceeded 6,000*l.*

The first managers were Messrs. Austin and Whitlock, who had previously been the lessees of the theatre at the Turk's Head.

### III. EXHIBITIONS.

The Shows which itinerated the country for the amusement of our forefathers in the beginning of the eighteenth century, were very similar to those with which we are ourselves familiar, Jugglers, Prize-fighters, Collections of Birds and Beasts, Natural Monstrosities, Wax-works, Ingenious Mechanism, &c., &c., &c.

In 1713, we have "two profound masters of the noble science of Defence," Thomas Soon of London, known as the "Bold Welshman," and William Emmerson, the "Norfolk Champion," who lately fought

In 1744, was an exhibition of Curiosities in Glass.

In 1747, amongst other wild beasts, a Rhinoceros was exhibited.

In 1750, was an exhibition of Sculpture, consisting of upwards of 400 figures in marble illustrative of the life of our Saviour. These figures were intended for the Royal Chapel at Versailles, but were captured with the French South Sea Fleet, and brought to England.

The same year were advertised for exhibition a Mummy, a Porpoise, and a Mermaid, the two last alive; in 1752, Tumbling and Rope-dancing. In 1754, a collection of Wax-work.

The same year was exhibited the "Learned Dog, who reads, writes, and casts accounts, answers various questions in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Geography, Roman, English, and Sacred History, knows the Greek Alphabet, &c., &c., &c.; also shews the impenetrable science, and tells every body's thoughts in company and distinguishes all sorts of colours."

The Learned Dog was succeeded by Powell the fire-eater, who after devouring live coals, laying his tongue on a plate of red-hot iron, and other feats of the same kind, wound up the performance "by mixing a quantity of rosin, pitch, bee's-wax, sealing-wax, brimstone, alum, and lead, melting them together over a chafing-dish of coals, and eating the said combustibles with a spoon, as natural as a porringer of broth, to the great surprize of all spectators."

These exhibitions became now so frequent that it would be tedious to pursue the subject further; but before quitting it we may advert to the magnificent display of Fire-works in celebration of the Peace in 1741, at the expense of the Corporation. A large wood-cut representing the arrangement of the exhibition, is given in the *Newcastle Journal*, being an early instance of an illustrated newspaper.

Here also we may briefly notice the early exhibitions of Flowers.

The Society of Florists and Botanists was established in Newcastle in 1724. For some years their exhibitions were held in the month of August, at Mr. David Wright's house at Elswick, where a dinner was provided for the company at half-a-crown a head. The first meeting was attended by the Mayor, Sheriff, and nearly 100 gentlemen. A great variety of carnations were exhibited, and the finest melons and other fruits which had ever been seen in the North. The choicest flower was shown by William Davison, Esq., of Beamish, and a prize for the best carnation of 40 shillings value was offered for competition in succeeding years.

This was won in 1727 by Mr. Jonathan Tyzac, with the Carnation-July-Flower called the *Large Painted Lady*. William Carr, Esq., and Matthew White, Esq., were chosen Stewards for 1728.

Crown, Quayside; Old Fleece, Custom-house Entry; Fountain, Quayside; Rose, Quayside; Globe, Sandhill; and the Forth House. In 1712 the charges at the Old Fleece were for "Portugal wines neat and natural, as imported by Brooke and Hellier, 14*d.* per quart without doors, 16*d.* within;" at the Globe in 1716, "Lisbon white wine and claret 16*d.* per quart, canary 1*s.* 10*d.*, best brandy 2*s.*, new mum 10*d.*, best red-streak cider or Burton ale 5*d.* a quart or 6*s.* the dozen, bottles included." Brandy is advertised at the Custom House about the same time, Coniac 9*s.* 6*d.* per gallon; good French 45*s.* per half anker. In 1713 there was a sale of the stock at the Queen's Head, in consequence of the bankruptcy of the landlord, when the wines advertised consisted of "clarets, sack, and white wine."

The Coffee-houses in 1712-3 were Bulman's, in the Flesh Market; Thibou's, in the Side; and Jasper Harrison's, on the Sandhill.

Besides the inns and taverns mentioned above, the following occur previous to 1730:—The Grapes, Fox and Lamb, Bird and Bush, Greyhound, and Three Storks, in Pilgrim Street; the Nag's Head, Butcher Bank; Unicorn, Broad Chare; Peacock, and Three Kings, Quayside; White Hall, and Pack Horse, Foot of Side; Blue Bell, Cross Keys, and Cock, Head of Side; Green Dragon, and Three Bulls' Heads, Castle Garth; White Swan, Flesh Market; Sun, Unicorn, Fighting Cocks, Royal Oak, and Scotch Arms, Bigg Market; Plough, Newgate Street; the Crown, without the Westgate: and the Nag's Head, George, Rose and Crown, and Blue Anchor, in Gateshead.

The Turk's Head, in the Bigg Market, was built about 1744 by Mr. William Parker, who had previously kept a cock-pit at Dunston-bank. The cock-pit at the Turk's Head was also a prominent feature in the new establishment.

About the same time we first meet with the Bull and Post-boy, in the Bigg Market, which was a rival of the Turk's Head a few years later in the coaching department.

The Queen's Head, in Pilgrim Street, was not established till some years later. It is remarkable that this house stands on the very spot indicated by Bourne as the site of the ancient Pilgrims' Inn, where the way-farers were entertained from whom the street took its name.

JOHN HODGSON BINDE.