

BLOODSTOCK WORLD



*The second in a monthly series celebrating the achievements of ten breeders who have enjoyed outstanding success and played crucial roles in the development of the thoroughbred in the course of the last 200 years. This month's subject is the brewing heir **William Hall Walker**, who put his faith in astrology and despite or, as he would have liked to believe, because of that, bred the granddams of seven important sires*

WILLIAM HALL WALKER evidently believed the date of his birth – Christmas Day 1856 – pre-ordained his success in life. Never mind that he was the son of a wealthy brewer who could afford to send him to Harrow and ensure he would never have to earn a living. His rise to prominence, as Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire, Member of Parliament for Widnes, and ultimately a peerage was all about being born under a lucky star.

He was also a notable achiever on the turf, as owner and breeder, which apparently came about with no thanks to the advice of William Chismon, one of the foremost pedigree authorities of his time, or the skills of Harry Sharpe, his outstanding stud groom. The runners he bred succeeded because the stars foretold their triumphs.

Hall Walker was a lifelong believer in astrology, insisting that the date and time of birth were crucial in determining the destinies of both humans and horses.

He employed an astrologer to draw up charts of all his foals and to divine, from relating the positions of the heavenly bodies to the precise time of their births, their prospects on the racecourse. And he routinely fired his trainers when their charges did not deliver what the astrologer predicted.

He was, of course, a crank, in addition to being dogmatic, cantankerous and perverse, but there can be no denying that he bred high-class stock, however one cares to attribute the reasons for it.

He also had an enduring impact on the development of the breed in more ways than one. Seven grandsons of mares for whom he was responsible became important sires; hardly less significant, it was he who persuaded the Aga Khan – grandfather of the present Aga – to take up racing and breeding in Britain.

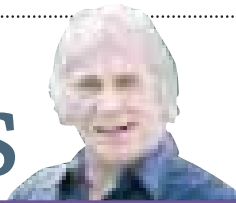
Hall Walker's colours were carried to victory in the 1896 Grand National by The Soarer, but his first notable successes as owner and breeder on the Flat resulted from his purchase in 1900 of Black Cherry, a daughter of the disappointing sire Bendigo.

Two years later she produced Cherry Lass, winner of both filly Classics and the St James's Palace Stakes, and in the following spring Black Arrow, a dual Royal Ascot winner in the Coventry and St James's Palace.

Witch Elm, foaled in 1904, was nothing like so good as

'Dogmatic, cantankerous and perverse, but there's no denying that he bred high-class stock'

TONY MORRIS'S BREEDING GREATS



Cherry Lass, but she emulated her as heroine of a 1,000 Guineas and best of her sex at three. She also helped Hall Walker to head the winning owners' list in 1907, repeating his achievement of 1905.

Two smart performers featured among the foal crop of 1905. Royal Realm won the Gimcrack Stakes and continued to compete prominently until six; White Eagle had three productive seasons, including wins in the National Breeders' Produce Stakes, the Sussex Stakes and a couple at Royal Ascot.

SIX OF Hall Walker's 1906 crop were leased to the King for their racing careers, and among them was Minoru, who won on his debut at Epsom, before finishing second in both the Coventry and July Stakes.

A satisfactory first season was followed by a triumphant one at three, when he won six out of seven. He was not the best of his year by a long chalk, but Bayardo had yet to attain peak fitness at the time of the first two colts' Classics and Minoru took the honours at both Newmarket and Epsom. The first – and still only – Derby victory for a colt in the reigning monarch's colours was greeted with scenes of unprecedented euphoria.

The best horse Hall Walker ever bred was Prince Palatine, foaled in 1908. The colt's horoscope perhaps failed to indicate his promise, because he was sold privately as a yearling for £2,000, and it was in the livery of Thomas Pilkington that he distinguished himself as one of the best middle-distance and staying performers of the pre-

World War I era. Still, his accomplishments at four made Hall Walker that season's leading breeder.

There was one more Classic win to come, and it came as a shock, 50-1 Night Hawk (out of Black Cherry's daughter Jean's Folly) taking the 1913 St Leger for the only success of his career.

I have Hall Walker's copy of the horoscopes for his foal crop of 1911, which contains a host of bizarre predictions, few actually hitting the mark. Among the comments about Carrickfergus was the observation: '1914, you might just as well take his shoes off and let him run loose in the paddock.' In fact, that was the year of his best win, in the St James's Palace Stakes.

The last prominent runner in Hall Walker's colours was Let Fly, who emulated his half-brother Great Sport by reaching a place in the Derby and surpassed him by winning the

Dewhurst and Champion Stakes.

Having already disposed of Minoru to Russia, where the dual Classic hero disappeared at the time of the revolution, Hall Walker allowed Let Fly to depart for Argentina and in 1916 decided on a complete withdrawal from breeding.

The stud that he established at Tully in 1902 and had developed into a showpiece property he offered to the nation, with all the resident stock, that included four stallions and 43 broodmares. A sale was effected, at the government's own valuation, and the National Stud was founded. Many years later it had a fresh incarnation as the Irish National Stud.

In recognition of his gesture Hall Walker was raised to the peerage as the 1st Baron Wavertree in 1919, the year in which he was also somewhat belatedly elected to the Jockey Club. He later dabbled in bloodstock at a much reduced

level – so far below the scale of his former involvement that at his death in 1933 the five mares and three foals he owned were sold for the pittance of 185gns the lot.

Although he ceased to be a breeder of any consequence in 1916 Hall Walker was recognised several decades later for his enduring influence on the breed through his connection with a number of highly successful stallions.

BLANDFORD, bred by the National Stud in 1919, was three times champion sire at home and once in France, with four Derby winners to his name; he was a grandson of Black Cherry.

Gondollette, the dam of Great Sport and Let Fly, was sold to Lord Derby when carrying Serenissima, who became the granddam of Sickle and Pharamond, both notable sires in America, and of Hyperion, a dual Classic winner and six-time champion sire, important on a global scale. Sickle appeared twice close up in the pedigree of Sea-Bird's sire Dan Cupid, Pharamond featured in the background of Sir Ivor.

Challenger, bred at the National Stud in 1927, was out

of a mare by Great Sport whose dam was a modest winner for Hall Walker; he became a major sire in the States, his products including three champions in Horse of the Year Challedon, Bridal Flower and Gallorette.

Big Game was bred at the National Stud in 1939, and won the 2,000 Guineas in King George VI's colours before a successful career as a stallion. His granddam was Dolabella, one of Hall Walker's 1911 foal crop for whom the astrologer predicted 'not only a successful racing career, but famous offspring'.

As a runner she managed only a single win from 22 efforts, but the forecast for stud success proved more accurate; her daughter Myrobella had speed and class, and it was she who produced Big Game.

Princequillo, foaled in 1940, was a first-rate stayer in the US and later a major sire there, responsible for 65 individual stakes-winners. His granddam was the useless runner Quick Thought, a Hall Walker-bred daughter of White Eagle.

The likes of White Eagle, Great Sport and Royal Realm were never popular with other breeders and their overall record as sires was poor.

But via Hall Walker mares who generally had little to commend them in their own athletic merit featured close up in the pedigrees of numerous top-class runners and stallions.

William Hall Walker might well be characterised as a weirdo for the attention he paid to the horoscopes of the foals he bred, but astrology played no part in his *modus operandi* as a breeder.

That seemed to be principally about mating mares who were inbred to an influential sire with stallions who were inbred to a different influential sire.

The results he achieved proved he had a knack.

WALKER'S SENSATIONS NOTABLE HORSES HE BRED

►► **f Cherry Lass** (1902, Isinglass - Black Cherry, by Bendigo). Champion 3-y-o filly; 1,000 Guineas, Oaks, St James's Palace S.

►► **c Black Arrow** (1903, Count Schomberg - Black Cherry, by Bendigo). Coventry S., St James's Palace S.

►► **f Witch Elm** (1904, Orme - Cannie Lassie, by Ayrshire). Champion 3-y-o filly; 1,000 Guineas.

►► **c Royal Realm** (1905, Persimmon - Sand Blast, by Sheen). Gimcrack S.

►► **ch White Eagle** (1905, Gallinule - Merry Gal, by Galopin). National Breeders' Produce S., Sussex S.

►► **br c Minoru** (1906, Cyllene - Mother Siegel, by Friar's Balsam). 2,000 Guineas, Derby S.

►► **c Prince Palatine** (1908, Persimmon - Lady Lightfoot, by Isinglass). Champion 3-y-o, best horse of the year at 4 and 5, St Leger S., Coronation Cup, Gold Cup [twice], Eclipse S.



King Edward VII looks on admiringly at his dual Classic winner Minoru

►► **br c Night Hawk** (1910, Gallinule - Jean's Folly, by Ayrshire). St Leger.

►► **c Carrickfergus** (1911, Count Schomberg - Lady Lightfoot, by Isinglass). St James's Palace S.

►► **c Let Fly** (1912, White Eagle - Gondollette, by Loved One). Dewhurst Plate, Champion S.