

RPSUNDAY

Your essential relaxing weekend read

'I've been a collector all my life, but what had I collected of any value worth passing on? Not much, it seemed'

Tony Morris, page 15

'Ramsden surveys his string as they exercise behind a stable yard also housing three sheep, a couple of dogs and a few stray ducks'

On Location, page 17



'My father, an ex-prisoner of war, always said that the only time you should start worrying is when they put you up against a wall to shoot you'

Questionnaire, page 16

EDWARD WHITAKER (RACINGPOST.COM/PHOTOS)



Peter Walwyn, pictured at home in Lambourn, has lived in the village for 52 years and more than 90 people attended a party there last month to celebrate his latest achievement

A REWARDING LIFE

YOU wouldn't buy him at the sales because he doesn't trot up too well these days. And anyway his wife Bonk wouldn't sell him, although doubtless she has been tempted down the years when he has done something particularly daffy.

But next month Peter Walwyn will make the journey to Windsor Castle – in a borrowed car as his own jalopy is not guaranteed to get the trip – to receive an MBE. The award, in the dry patois of such citations, is “for services to racing” and is therefore

Alastair Down talks to former champion trainer Peter Walwyn about his career in the sport as he prepares to receive an MBE for services to racing



partly in recognition of twice being champion trainer and for having brought us Grundy, prince of all he surveyed in 1975. But what this MBE really does is salute the fact that Walwyn, benignly bonkers but no fool, has given more to the sport and

its people than he ever took. Now 78, Walwyn is a cult figure among those who abhor the petty tyrannies of the politically correct. Some of his views might have the more liberal denizens of Hampstead choking on their muesli of a morning

but there are two things to bear in mind about Walwyn. First, there is a rugged kindness that underpins his outlook and, second, he is a very fine character actor and the role he has become quite brilliant at is playing himself.

And to talk to him is to take great leaps back in British history. His father fought in the Boer War and on the Western Front and must have been a notably courageous officer, as he was awarded the Military Cross and DSO and was mentioned in despatches on three occasions.

It is incredible to relate that Walwyn's grandfather was at the Second Relief of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, an engagement of such unbridled ferocity that on November 16 of that year more VCs were won – a total of 24 – than on any other day in military history.

Walwyn says: “My father was a far better horseman and horsemaster than I have ever been. He was involved in the opening artillery barrage of the war in 1914,” and by

▶▶Continues page 14

RPSUNDAY

THE BIG INTERVIEW

'At Epsom I watched Grundy from Lord Derby's box and I'm sure I deafened the lot of them'

►►From page 13

way of proof he pops into the next room and returns with the polished brass casing of a 13-pounder shell.

You might think Walwyn's National Service rank as corporal in the Intelligence Corps marked something of a disappointment in terms of a military career, but he says: "I had back trouble which meant I was refused a commission, but that actually rebounded to my advantage.

"I had undoubtedly led something of a sheltered life as a boy but suddenly I was thrust into a different world with people from absolutely every walk of life. It gave me insight and understanding into ordinary, everyday people and the lives they lead. It was invaluable."

His first job in racing was with Geoffrey Brooke in Newmarket. Brooke had been private trainer to Major Lionel Holliday, a hugely successful Yorkshire owner-breeder of fiery temperament and a choleric disposition. One day Holliday rang up and said: "Brooke, what happened to my filly at Ripon last night? One of my friends said she didn't run well and she didn't look well either."

Brooke replied: "I did not know you had any friends" and put the phone down. If that was brave, he showed it was no flash in the pan by taking on Walwyn as his first pupil-assistant when he set up on his own in 1952.

Walwyn says: "I was in charge of the bottom yard, which was a sea of mud and populated entirely by completely wild Irish lads. But we had a wonderful head man, Bob Ruttle, and I began to learn about feeding and dealing with problem horses.

"In those days a lot of horses still went to places like Doncaster and Manchester by special train with a carriage for the travelling head lads, then the horses and a guard's van on the back."

Out of the blue Walwyn was approached by his first cousin Helen Johnson Houghton, sister of Fulke Walwyn, to join her at Blewbury. Her husband Gordon, an immensely promising trainer, had been killed in a hunting accident back in 1951. As

women were not officially allowed to train, others had held the licence for her, and now she wanted Peter to do so.

Mrs Johnson Houghton was a horsewoman of towering reputation and Walwyn stayed for five successful years before the moment came to strike out on his own.

Peter and Bonk were married in January 1960 and later that year they bought Windsor House in Lambourn and for £12,000 got a nice Georgian house and two cottages which included a hostel, 30 boxes and 11 acres.

HE RECALLS: "Our first winner was with our second ever runner, Don Verde ridden by John Lawrence [now Oaksey] in a novice hurdle at Worcester when, despite making a hash of the second-last, they won by eight lengths."

In 1961 a yearling arrived who would become one of Walwyn's stalwarts. From 1963 Be Hopeful won every year for a decade and landed his last triumph at Brighton in 1973 at the age of 14. He trained many finer racehorses but none more durable.

But it is Seven Barrows that became the yard indelibly associated with Walwyn and he bought it off Henry Candy's father, Derrick, in late 1965. Walwyn says: "It was a fabulous place but it needed a huge amount doing to it. The lads' hostel had more rats than the Pied Piper led out of Hamelin and the stables needed complete renovation with new floors.

"We had our first winner, Crozier, from Seven Barrows at Easter 1966 and training is only about winners because it is winners that keep owners and stop them looking over their shoulders to see if the grass is greener elsewhere."

In just a couple of years the yard took off and by 1969 he was approaching the pinnacle of his profession. Lucyrowe won the Coronation Stakes at Royal Ascot – where Town Crier took the Queen



Anne – then the Nassau Stakes. Humble Duty, with stable jockey Duncan Keith up, took the Lowther and the Cheveley Park before sealing her greatness by taking the following season's 1,000 Guineas, Coronation and Sussex Stakes.

Walwyn says: "Once a year I still read George Lambton's famous book 'Men and Horses I Have Known' as you always find something more in it. I never forgot his dictum to trainers, 'curb your curiosity', by which he meant don't keep going and asking them questions at home that should only be answered on the racecourse.

It is very easy to do, particularly on the hills round here."

It was Grundy who provided Walwyn with the zenith of his career. He says: "We went to Overbury, the Holland-Martin stud in Gloucestershire, and there was this flashy looking bugger, but he had great style about him and their very knowledgeable stud groom Peter Diamond said, 'This is a horse you should buy'."

"Usually it took a month to break a horse in but Grundy was boisterous and he took two. It is all about steady perseverance, getting their mouth

right and their deportment and never, under any circumstance being cruel.

"He looked encouraging in his early work, so one morning I worked him with a three-year-old who had won a handicap on the heath day of Royal Ascot.

"You sit there all those mornings on your hack and perhaps six or eight times in a lifetime one will go past that sends that cold shiver down your spine. It is the fascination of excellence – seeing a horse you have broken in from nothing suddenly change into something else in front of your eyes. Grundy was the most

What they say about Peter Walwyn . . .

►►John Dunlop (below)

He is a curiously difficult man to assess and all that Basil Fawley stuff belittles him and his record. Back in the 1970s it was Peter and Henry Cecil who were always hammering on each other's door in terms of big races and championships.

Henry had the advantage of being the younger man and there was a fierce degree of competition between them and not much love lost, although I don't know



exactly why. Peter achieved a huge amount, particularly in the glory days of Humble Duty and Grundy, and for some years he seemed to win just about every Classic trial going.

He was remarkably consistent and hugely successful, although as everyone knows he lost a few owners along the way. Towards the end of his career he suffered, rather like me, from owners growing old, falling off the perch or taking to strong drink! But he has been a splendid turfiste of very long standing and, like many others, I am delighted for him that he has got this MBE.

He has been blessed with the most splendid wife and I have great admiration for the pair of them.

►►Richard Phillips

P Walwyn is lucky in that he doesn't really care what the rest of the world thinks. He has a huge heart that means well, but there is an element of "my way is the right way" and everyone else is just wrong. It is all black and white with him and that can come over as arrogance in remarks like "my horses are too fast to catch a virus", which was something of a hostage to fortune and wouldn't

endear him to anyone struggling with sick horses.

Yet he couldn't care less where someone has come from, or that they have a humble background, because he has always wanted to be a giver and seeing the good side of people is an important part of him – just look at all the work he has done providing housing in Lambourn. And his staff loved him and many stayed with him for donkey's years.

And Bonk is a miracle – just like a second heart pumping away next to Pete's. As in all great marriages she makes a virtue of his faults as well as enjoying his gifts – she's always jolly and makes everything fun. If Pete lost a dog in the mincer she'd make a great story of it, which would always be accompanied by a decent gin and tonic.

He and Bonk adopted two children and that is all about having a big heart as well, isn't it? I've said before that he is someone to celebrate because he is a character who has the self-belief to stay one. And, most of all, his enthusiasm is enduring and undimmed – something that is rarer and more admirable than you might think.



Peter Walwyn (left) had his greatest day as a trainer when Grundy won the Derby in 1975, but it was the Epsom hero's defeat of Bustino (above) in the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes the following month that has gone down as the race of the century. In times less happy: Alec Wildenstein (right) removed his horses from Walwyn after a disagreement with the trainer about Pat Eddery



marvellous mover and as tough as old boots."

If there is one place Walwyn loves as deeply as he does Lambourn it is Epsom on Derby Day. A lifelong water colourist who still goes to lessons once a week, he says: "William Frith's magnificent painting Derby Day captures it all – toffs, touts and tart, a complete microcosm of life."

"I had already trained the runner-up twice before Grundy won. I watched it from Lord Derby's box and I am sure I deafened the lot of them and after the race we all went up to be congratulated by the Queen, which was marvellous."

"It turned into a very long day. On the way home we stopped as a pee was needed and there was some graffiti on the wall which read 'the future of England is in your hands' and on that day I remember thinking that it probably was."

"We had a great party when we got home and one of our oldest friends, who was quite mad, turned up at midnight in a black cab still in his top hat with yet another case of champagne. He was still here three days later and when we finally got rid of him he got on the wrong train and ended up somewhere in Somerset rather than London."

And, of course, Grundy's defeat of Bustino in the King George was yet to come. It is hard to define why many believed it to be the race of the century. After all there have been even closer finishes in the big race and greater winners, though not many."

But ask anyone who watched it and they will tell you of the immediate certainty they felt as they trooped down from the stands that there had been something primal and almost savagely noble about the struggle they had witnessed. Everyone just knew in

their marrow that Grundy and Bustino would be talked about as long as there were people left on the planet to whom hard battles between horses on high summer grass were matters of importance.

OF COURSE, Walwyn's black and white persona inevitably led to the occasional drama and disagreement with owners, none more so than with the Wildensteins, whom he regards with a cordial loathing to this day.

The horses came to Walwyn from Angel Penna in France, and mastering his distaste Walwyn says: "One day there should be a party for the former trainers of the Wildensteins and I think the Albert Hall would be a very suitable venue. Alec Wildenstein was always the most troublesome of them all. After Buckskin, who had the most awful feet in the world, was fourth in the Gold Cup they said that Pat Eddery was not to ride for them again. Having counted to about 100 I told them that if Pat couldn't ride 'em they could go and take their horses with them. They went the following morning."

It was perhaps the skirmishes with the Wildensteins and others that led Walwyn to invent his famous bus that is always on its way over Beachy Head packed with those he would happily never see again.

He says: "That Alec Wildenstein is the driver and Willie Carson is the conductor. And the other people I don't get on with each has a seat in the window with the best view as they go over the cliff. Job done."

For all his occasional bombast Walwyn has been hugely touched by having had nearly 500 letters of congratulation since the announcement of his MBE. Lameness

apart, he is in good form, but even if he wasn't he would never let on.

Three years ago he had a major scare, but even that has passed into legend, and Bonk takes up the tale: "We were coming back in the car from seeing the grandchildren and he was mumbling away a bit more than usual. I said 'Peter, are you having a stroke?' and he replied 'I don't know, I've never had one before.'"

She adds: "Another time when he had a bad fall out hunting he went a very odd colour, so we shot him into hospital. Eventually, before they let him out, a very serious doctor came to me and said 'Mrs Walwyn, I am afraid he may not be quite the same as other people. He could be a bit tricky, have mood swings and jump up and down and shout a bit.'" History does not relate whether the doctor was surprised or reassured to receive the reply, "Nothing new there then".

It is unlikely that Lambourn ever had a greater benefactor and friend than Walwyn and last Monday there was a not-much-of-a-surprise party for him at Oaksey House with more than 90 on hand to celebrate his forthcoming gong.

Bonk says: "It was a marvellous and, I must admit, an emotional occasion. His mother and father weren't too keen on him going into racing – they thought it was a 'bit fast' as they used to say. But we've been here in Lambourn 52 years, have survived and still love it and its people."

"He is so chuffed about his MBE, completely thrilled. Mind you, our daughter Kate and I have had to have new outfits for Windsor Castle and when he sees the inroads we've made in his cheque book he may be lost for words for once! But life's about laughing – at least it always has been here."

TONY MORRIS



LAST weekend I did something that I hadn't done for 20 years. Depending on how well you think you know me, you may now be guessing either he's been to a jumps meeting, he's managed to force himself into a pair of strides with a 34-inch waist, or something that might relate to the knowledge that all my children are now adults.

No, wrong on all three counts. What I did was prompted by what I told you about a fortnight ago – the fact that, according to a medium who professed to know my future, on January 28 I was to come into a lot of money. It obviously behaved me to make some decisions over what to do with it all.

It came as quite a shock – to me and presumably to the clairvoyante Tara – when the predicted windfall did not materialise, but no matter; there were other reasons why it made sense to draw up a new will, not the least of them being that the current one, dated January 1992, bequeathed my home to the woman who walked out of my life in 1999.

I'd obviously been tempting providence for a long time and something needed to be done. Over the last two decades there had been a lot of hatches and matches in the Morris clan, and before I joined the dispatches some order had to be restored to my estate.

The exercise turned out to be rather depressing. I've been a collector all my life, but what had I collected of any value worth passing on? Not much, it seemed. And it was clear that the collections couldn't remain collections.

No way could there be another person on the planet with my taste in music. Who would want, among many other things, the complete recorded works of Buddy Holly and Bessie Smith, all the Wagner operas, the 106 symphonies of Haydn, and significant chunks of the output from Ray Charles, Josephine Baker, Marie Lloyd, Paul Robeson and Billie Holiday?

But I could at least spread all the Exeter City paraphernalia and memorabilia around the family now that I had four male descendants converted to the cause. There would be grateful recipients for the Grecian mugs, glasses, towels, badges, lighters, mirrors, pencils, items of apparel, not to mention my cherished signed and framed shirt.

As for the books, there must be 6,000 of them, with charity shops the likeliest destination for many. But there is just one that should be retained in the family, if only to recognise the risks that I took to obtain it.

It was November 1960, and as we trooped out of chapel we were told to assemble on the quad for a school meeting. Fearsome headmaster Fred Paul then proceeded to lecture us on the subject of 'a certain book' being published that day. If our parents allowed us to read it, he said, that was fine, but any boy found with

This particular lover was worth it in the end

a copy in Exeter School would be rusticated.

He didn't need to identify the book, because it had recently been the subject of an extensively publicised trial, and although the verdict had been that it was not obscene, Fred clearly disagreed.

That lunchtime two mates and I got on our bikes and rode into town. That was breaking bounds and a potential two-hour detention on Saturday afternoon on its own. Going in search of that certain book was even more reckless. Can I say that we didn't know the meaning of the word fear? We certainly didn't know what rusticated meant.

We must have tried six shops before we struck lucky. The book was not on display, but when we posed the question, the copies emerged from under the counter, already in paper bags. Having each parted with 3s 6d, we pedalled away triumphant.

BACK at school, I immediately consigned my copy to my locker. But the word had swiftly got around and within half an hour the lock had been picked. The next thing I knew, my precious new acquisition was in the hands of the head prefect. It was time to check the dictionary for 'rusticated'.

There was a free period that afternoon and I sat in the library a living definition of trepidation. At the other end of the room my book was being scrutinised, and the fact that someone else was acquainting himself with the juicy bits before I'd had the chance was the least of my concerns. I had openly defied the beak, who would remember that he'd had occasion to rebuke me for my outrageous behaviour on Derby day in 1958.

When the bell rang, naturally filled with dread, I was summoned into the presence of the head prefect. He calmly handed me the book, suggesting that I take it home and leave it there. Never in my life was I so relieved.

I daresay there is a copy of Lady Chatterley's Lover in half the nation's households now, but how many have the first unexpurgated edition, purchased on the day of publication, still in pristine condition?

'Copies of the book emerged from under the counter already in paper bags'