



## History of Northaw Races

Hertfordshire, concerning mainly the land of Hatfield, Enfield and Northaw not only holds claim as traditionally being excellent **cross country riding** ground but also as one of the most ancient.

Historical records state that Elizabeth I raced Hatfield Park back in 1557, organising an event that boasted a 'field' wearing fantastic hunting dress, lavish white satin costumes and the infamous attire of the red coat, yellow capped archers with their gilded bows.

It wasn't until the reign of James I, who was so fond of the area that Theobalds Park as well as Northaw were added, creating a race that covered all of these lands right the way through to Chesunt and as far down as Southgate. James I was reportedly so fond of the area that he spent most of his leisure time there even to his last, when he died in Theobalds Park on 27 March 1625.

Onwards in history and we meet the civil war, which saw the destruction of the King's Palace at Theobalds by Cromwell's men. However, although the appreciation for the land may have been diminished by some figures in history, it only meant that others would re-awaken it later.

Sir John Monson acquired the land in Broxbournebury establishing a deer park in 1646, maintaining its use for good **cross country rides**. The land remained in the Monson family up until 1789 until it was sold to Jacob Basonquet, a director of the Honourable East India Company. From here onwards the land traditionally has been used for Chace and cross country races with various established hound foundations as well as use by the **Hertfordshire hunt Committee**. The outbreak of the First World War saw the races abandoned, only to be kept going for two days a week by Major G.R.B Smith Basonquet, much to the gratification of men on home leave. The "Major" as he was affectionately known spent much of his reign as Master improving the country and maintaining the glory of the chace, until he stepped down in 1934-35. He was one of the last great sporting squires, restoring the prestige of the Chace and quality of the

land. Followers of the Chace and cross country riders will long owe him a debt of gratitude.

It was in the country lands and Chace culture that gave birth to **Point to Point racing**. Point to Point racing began famously just over 250 years ago in 1752 with a race between two neighbours when a Mr Blake challenged Mr O'Callaghan to race across country. The race was from Buttevant Church to Doneraile Church jumping over any walls, fences or ditches they came across as they aimed for the steeple (thus the name "**Steeple chase**" or "**Point Chase**").