

That we possess in Britain a great bay horse of strength and grace; a breed so ancient that foals can carry the vestigial leg stripes and the dorsal stripe (eel line) of the Tarpan, the now extinct European Wild Horse; is an enigma. Its origins are mysterious but are steeped in antiquity. Its association with those eponymous Yorkshire hills are legendary. This horse bears no resemblance to the native pony breeds, nor to the 'black' hairy legged heavy types introduced into Britain by the Celtic tribes and later others by King John, who imported a hundred stallions from France. The association of the Cleveland Bay with Yorkshire and the proximity of Hadrian's Wall are not coincidental, but rather the result of an introduction made some 1,836 years ago.

Just to the south of the Cleveland Hills is situated the ancient city of York; a vital centre in Roman times, a staging post for Hadrian's Wall, the greatest construction (122/126 AD) ever undertaken by the Romans in Britain. The Wall ran from Bowness on Solway to the River Tyne and could be accessed from York by Dere Street, a road which extended beyond the Wall, all the way to the later Antonine Wall (143AD) which ran between Bowness on the Forth to Duntocher on the Clyde.

In the Southern Ukraine lived a nomadic race of warriors of Indo-Iranian origins, known as the Sarmatians. They had migrated into this area in the 4th Century BC and had displaced or absorbed the Scythians from the Black Sea coast. The Sarmatians revered horses and warfare. They shared religious and political authority with women. Burials by the Molochna River entombed Sarmatian woman complete with chain mail, lances, swords and arrows. The young Sarmatian princess buried at Kobiakov on the River Don had her own battle axe placed in her tomb together with the harness from her horses. Young Sarmatian girls had one breast cauterised to prevent development, to allow free use of the bow when they became older. These women were indeed the race of Amazons alluded to in Greek myth. The burial of a Prince at the Ulskii site, contained the remains of 360 horses, tethered in groups of 18 and forming a ring around the outer circumference of the mound. The Sarmatian aristocracy enjoyed enormous wealth, founded on the wheat trade. This they grew and exported over the Black Sea into the Mediterranean. The Greek city states were willing purchasers and in return the Sarmatians were able to acquire some of the most sophisticated gold work and jewellery ever crafted in the Classical World.

The Sarmatian warriors wore a metal helmet, chain mail, a leather jerkin with metal strips and carried a shield. Their armament included a long metal tipped lance, a sword over 4 foot long, a bow and arrows and possibly an axe. Their horses were protected with chain mail, greaves on the legs, a metal helmet known as a chamfron and a breast plate or pectoral. These were formidable warriors and indeed the first mounted knights in armour; the fore runners of Medieval Chivalry. They had an on off association with the Roman Empire, sometimes fighting for the Romans as mercenaries and also receiving subsidies to keep to their own territory, out of the bounds of Rome. They sometimes invaded Roman territory and it was just such an incursion that sparked off the Marcomannian Wars. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius gained the upper hand and in AD175 concluded a peace treaty which compelled the Sarmatians to send 5500 warriors, together with their weapons and horses to Britain. They rode over the extensive road network across the Empire and eventually arrived at Ribchester on the way north to Hadrian's Wall, in Ribblesdale near Preston. From here they were sent north to patrol Hadrian's Wall and to keep the

road open to the Antonine Wall, before its early abandonment. The Sarmation warriors settled in the area, taking local wives but did not forget their traditions and skills. They are later recorded as 'cuneus sarmatorum' because of the wedge formation which they employed to charge down upon an enemy. Their lances were capable of piercing through two soldiers simultaneously. The Picts and Scots made extensive use of cavalry but were mounted on ponies, using a slashing sabre like weapon. The presence of such a huge number of Sarmations was a palpable and effective deterrent against incursions and attacks by these wild tribesmen. There is direct evidence that the Sarmations remained on duty at the Wall right to the end of the Roman presence in Britain in 410 AD; a period of 235 years, and even after.

To keep a cavalry force of 5,500 in the field is a massive logistical exercise, not only do the animals have to be fed and cared for, they also have to be replaced. Roman sources suggest an attrition rate of 25% or 1,375 animals a year in this case. Assuming a horse could not be used until it is 4 years old; this implies at least 5,500 young animals in the system, as foals, yearlings and so on. The Sarmations required a strong heavily built animal, capable of carrying protection and a warrior over rough terrain at speed. They naturally continued to breed the animals of their fore-fathers. This activity must have been wide spread in the area and carried out by warriors no longer fit for active service; the horses were of Parthian type, considered huge by contemporary commentators and were selected for the bay colour because bay horses have black feet which were found to be harder and less prone to cracking. These were vital characteristics as the Romans did not shoe their horses. These heavy cavalry horses and their armoured warriors were known as Cataphracts.

When the Roman Legions were withdrawn in 410AD, the Sarmations chose to remain. Northern Britain was now their home and they had the expertise to defend and hold territory against any foe they encountered. Civilisation was collapsing and brigandage stalked the land. The Romans had divided Britain into three commands. The Dux Britanniarum who had his headquarters in York, to defend the northern frontier against the Picts and Scots; the Comes Vitoris Saxonici, the Count of the Saxon Shore; to defend the south eastern coast against Saxons, Jutes and Angles. In reserve was the Comes Britanniarum with a highly mobile field army of 6 cavalry and three infantry units. Britain was now in charge of its own defence and this was achieved by emulating the old Roman order. The British Sarmations were one of the few groups with the ability to rout these invaders. They defended their own lands and probably roamed beyond their normal operating area to forestall possible attack. In 475AD Artorius or Arthur was born, later to become Comes Britanniarum; a leader who trained and organised heavy cavalry units to push out the invaders and restore stability to the land. It is instructive that many of his battles took place north of the Wall, against the Picts and Scots. The only cavalry units capable of undertaking warfare on this scale at that time were the British Sarmations. Twelve major victories were gained, the last at Mt Badon in 516AD. This victory was so complete it discouraged further incursions for a generation. Using the roads left by the Romans cavalry units were capable of travelling 40 miles in two hours and still have adequate reserves to make a useful contribution in an engagement. Arthur's great achievement was to weld this fighting force together and give it a nationalistic perspective. A parochial attitude to defence is favourable to an invader because it allows him to overcome a succession of small local defence forces with ease.

The Saxons fought on foot with battle-axe and sword, in accordance with the ancient Germanic tradition. They would have been unable to withstand a large well-armed force of heavy cavalry using the now well practiced shock tactics.

Peace was granted to Britain but for a short time, its nemesis was marked by the death of Arthur in civil war. The survivors of an army broken by discord eventually found their way back to the north and continued farming and horse rearing in those upland hills. Meanwhile successive waves of Saxons, Angles and Jutes colonised the east coast of southern Britain. The Saxon royal court of the Wuffings was located at Rendlesham between 599-749AD. Their Royal cemetery was at Sutton Hoe. Here were buried the great long ships laden with treasure and a royal prince with his horse. It was for this court that the epic saga of Beowulf was written. One passage is particularly relevant:

*'Then Beowulf caused to be brought in
a standard bearing the image of a boar,
together with a helmet towering in battle,
a grey corselet, and a noble sword; he said:
Hrothgar, the wise King gave me
these trappings and purposefully asked me
to tell you their history; he said that Heorogar
Lord of the Scyldings, long owned them
yet he has not endowed his own brave son,
Heorowear, with this armour, much as
he loves him. Make good use of everything!*

*I heard that four bays, apple brown,
were brought in to the hall after the armour –
swift as the wind; identical. Beowulf gave them
as he gave the treasures. So should a kinsman do,
and never weave nets with underhand subtlety
to ensnare others, never have designs
on a close comrades life.'*

The standard, helmet, corselet of chain mail and great sword given by Beowulf were trophies of war; they represent the typical armament of the British Sarmations. The standard bearing an image of a boar was used by the XX Legion – the Valeria Victrix. This Legion took part in the invasion of Britain by the Emperor Claudius and defeated Caratacus and later put down the uprising of Boudica. It later built Hadrian's and the Antonine Wall. It was heavily involved in the defence of the Wall for a long period. The Sarmations worked with this Legion providing the cavalry element. A Roman standard was indeed a great treasure and provides a fascinating link between the Wall and the bay horses in a saga that was written ca.700AD.

From the Dark Ages to the Middle Ages; still as perennial as it is today, the farming year turned and the war horses of yesterday became the tillers of land, carriers of the harvest, of hay and grain. Those that fashioned swords, forged plough shears. Yet the bay horses, mighty enough to carry a warrior into battle, had every quality to meet the demands of an agrarian economy.

The great Cistercian Abbeys of Rivaulx and Fountains were founded in the early 1130s'. Chartered to bring civilisation to a wild land, they by a system of working lay brothers, undertook a range of activities, including farming, quarrying and horse breeding, the bays inured to local conditions, and strong, were ideal for their purpose and were used for not only agricultural tasks, but also as pack horses to service what became the economic power houses of the area. With the dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, the Abbeys became ruins but the great bay horses, remained, sustained by generations of Dalesmen.

The pack horse tradition continued with goods being brought into the Dales by Chapman. This was one of the few contacts that people in these isolated hilly areas had with the outside world, before the advent of an efficient road system.

The Elizabethan era saw the introduction of coaches and the Cleveland horse with its strength, action and endurance was well suited to these vehicles. Clevelands were then known as Gallowers or Chapman horses. The colour was predominantly bay, though in some areas there were chestnut horses as well.

There was always a strong aversion to crossing Clevelands with hairy legged cart horse types; indeed it is difficult to gauge any benefit that would derive from such a cross, the Clevelands having virtually all the working qualities of the larger breeds but having greater pace.

In the 18th Century, 78 mares were selected to put to the Darley Arabian, the Byerley Turk and the Godolphin Barb; of these 70 were Yorkshire Gallowers. These were the progenitors of the modern Thoroughbred horse. The selectors of these mares recognised the affinity of the Arabian with the Yorkshire Gallower due to the oriental blood which the original Parthian horse carried.

In the Victorian era some Cleveland mares were put to Thoroughbred stallions to produce the Yorkshire Coach Horse, considered by aficionados to be 'the most beautiful coach horse the world has ever seen'; later mares of this stock were put back to Cleveland stallions to retain the original qualities of the breed. These horses proved to be very popular and were sold in large numbers.

But surging demand encouraged more out-crossing until it became a matter of concern to a few far seeing individuals who realised that the traditional Cleveland was disappearing and would be lost if nothing was done to secure its future. The remarkable contribution of William Scarth Dixon, must here be acknowledged. He was the first secretary of the Cleveland Bay Society and was responsible for the retrospective Volume I of the Stud Book. This is a work of scholarship which required research and dedication to an extraordinary degree, giving details of 567 stallions foaled previous to the 1st January 1880. Volume II, published in 1885 contained details of mares entered in the Foundation Stock Book. These mares had been inspected by Thomas Parrington and John Kirby and found to conform with the required Cleveland Bay type. Owners of Cleveland mares were encouraged to enter them in the stud book, the emphasis being upon colour, bone and strong compact conformation; an animal that was deep and wide in body, the back not too long, strong with muscular loins. The shoulders to be sloping, deep and muscular; the quarters level, powerful, long and oval. The Committee emphasised the importance

of the breed for agricultural work, no horse having such longevity, being more economical, or capable of more work. There is much evidence of the abilities of the Cleveland from modern times: as a pack horse carried 318kilos 60 miles in 24 hours four times a week; carried 102kilos 16 miles in an hour trotting, ridden 70 miles a day 6 days a week on the road.

The Committee found that the addition of Thoroughbred blood caused a loss of substance, therefore when entering Yorkshire Coaching mares, their progeny were accepted into the full Stud Book provided there was not more than 1/64 of Thoroughbred blood. Sir Alfred Pease noted that 'the true Cleveland does not run to weed' due to the purity of its blood, termed by the Arabs as 'Asalat' (rooted on an old foundation). However even the Cleveland cannot resist continued infusion of Thoroughbred blood, from this arises long light legs, narrowness and a long weak back; all undesirable features in a coach or working horse.

The excessive export of Clevelands posed a threat to the continuity of the breed. Some thousands were purchased by Governments and overseas breeders, to North and South America and the Continent. They were required for the purpose of grading up and imparting the inherent qualities of the Cleveland upon their own animals. Authorities in Germany acknowledged that all that was best in the Oldenburg breed was due to the Cleveland Bay. Joseph Lett a famous breeder and dealer in Clevelands sold horses to Italy, Portugal, Russia, Japan and America. On one occasion he sold 30 horses to Buffalo Bill for his Wild West show which featured that great hero of Native American resistance, the Dakota Sioux Chieftain 'Sitting Bull'.

Sir Alfred Pease was in charge of a re-mount depot during the First World War and found that most of the best horses for pulling guns 'gunners' were of undoubted Cleveland type and yet these had come from the United States and Canada. They were the progeny of the hundreds of Clevelands that had been exported to these countries over the previous forty years, resulting in the return of 'tens of thousands of gunners' and transport horses for the war effort.

After the Great War and the subsequent mechanisation of farms and transport, there was a dramatic decline in the number of Cleveland Bays in the UK. However in the USA there were good numbers of Cleveland type horses. In the 1950 film 'Wagon Master' directed by John Ford, there is a tremendous show of working Clevelands. But later in the 1950s the breed was reduced to just four pure bred stallions. The dedication of a handful of breeders from Yorkshire and the south of England, brought Clevelands back from the edge. Today Clevelands excel in the sport of carriage driving and cross bred Clevelands have proved to be of world class, winning dressage, three day events and show jumping competitions.

Clevelands have taken a leading role in state occasions for hundreds of years. It is their unique combination of grace, beauty and strength that makes them pre-eminent amongst all horses.

Even today, the link between the Cleveland and the Sarmations is more than a footnote in history. These warriors maintained their war like propensities and in 378AD in alliance with the Visigoths triumphed over the Romans at the battle of Adrianople. The Roman Legions were forced into a disorganised crush by the force

of the heavy cavalry making the foot soldiers unable to use their weapons. Only a third of the Roman army escaped leaving the first eastern Emperor Valens dead. This defeat marked a profound change in Roman tactics; they subsequently placed far more emphasis on the use of Cataphracts and these became the principle component of the army.

The last of the Sarmation tribes who rode through the chaos of the disintegrating Roman Empire were the Alans. They colonised areas in France, Spain and Portugal, even into the rocky outpost of Galicia. The aristocracy of Poland was founded on Sarmation incursions from this period; many of these families uniquely incorporating the brands with which they marked their animals into their coats of arms.

Today the Sarmations still live in the Caucasus Mountains of Ossetia. They speak their Indo-Iranian language and horses are an important part of their culture. Their Kabardins are very similar to the Cleveland, the majority being bay, but with some chestnuts. The newly born foals are almost identical to the Cleveland. A recent genetic study has revealed a direct link between the two breeds. This is welcome news for the Cleveland, because should the breed reach a genetic bottle-neck, the Karbardin could introduce new blood lines without losing the inherent qualities of the Cleveland in the resulting progeny. The Czech Kladruber has similar conformation but is black or grey in colour. Genetics demonstrate an atavistic relationship to the Cleveland.

It is evident that the immigration of the Sarmation tribes into Europe has left a genetic footprint in the equine population.

*When Cleveland hills in vernal charms are seen
Clothed with the velvet of unfading green,
The noblest stock of England's far famed steeds,
With lavish care the thriving farmer breeds,
By sires for fleetness and courage known,
From mares for strength, symmetry and bone,
Bred for power and all unstained with white;
Black – legged and bay, just as the rubies' bright.
And all things have parallel but one,
The Cleveland horse – he alone has none.
Horse may with horse contend, the swift, the fleet,
As noble rivals on the course they meet;
Some for their shape and symmetry we prize,
Others for strength surpassing, some for size.
But in the noble Cleveland are combined
All the rare qualities that grace his kind:
Beauty in his strength, courage, wind, and speed,
And more than all, he claims a stainless breed.*

Major Scoby's address to the Rydale Farmers Club circa 1925

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