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Teitl erthygl

"Travelling stallions in and adjacent to
Brycheiniog"

Article title

Teitl cylchgrawn
Journal title

Brycheiniog.
Brycheiniog

Rhifyn
Issue

Vol. 23 (1988/1989), p. 75-84.

url

JISC

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
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TRAVELLING STALLIONS IN AND ADJACENT TO BRYCHEINIOG

INTRODUCTION

Horses played a major role in the transport system in Britain until, in the years following the conclusion of the First World War, they were gradually ousted by motor vehicles. In 1917, when the first reasonably complete equine census of Britain was undertaken, there were 2,650, 773 horses in the country, 1,115,920 of which were used for agricultural purposes (Chivers, 1976). Horse breeding was therefore of great importance and a variety of attempts was made to improve the quality of horses by subsidising stallions that travelled the countryside during the breeding season, and that were available, at a fee, for the service of mares. This paper describes some of the routes followed by stallions that formerly travelled in Brycheiniog and adjacent counties.

TRAVELLING STALLIONS

During the horse breeding season, which for non-thoroughbred stock extends normally from April until July, stallions used to be led around the countryside in search of trade: of mares to service. The origins of the system are unknown, but it certainly existed as early as the fourteenth century in the Welsh borderlands (Chivers 1976). By the 19th century various agricultural societies were awarding premiums (i.e. financial subsidies) to the owners of stallions that were considered suitable and were made available for the service of local mares (Lewis, 1984).

In 1885 a show was held at Islington, in London, at which premiums were awarded to the exhibitors of six thoroughbred sires who were 'required to guarantee to tenant farmers the service of twenty mares at the low fee of 50s each,' (H.S.B. II). From this beginning developed the Hunters Improvement Society Premiums, which remain in existence in the 1980s, although the Premium Stallions no longer travel the countryside; instead, mares are now brought to the stallions, (Lewis, 1984).

In addition to the agricultural society and thoroughbred premiums, heavy horse hiring societies developed in the nineteenth century. Chivers (1976) has shown that they were initiated in Scotland in the 1830s, but the first non-ephemeral hiring society to be established in England and Wales was the Montgomeryshire District Entire Horse Association, founded in 1876. The aim of these societies was to hire suitable draught stallions for use on mares within the territory of each society. In 1914 the Board of Agriculture granted £40 to each approved hiring society in England and Wales, and these grants remained in existence until the Second World War. In 1939 four heavy horse hiring societies existed in Breconshire: the Glasbury Shire Horse Society; the Breconshire Shire Horse Society; the Devynock Shire Horse Society; the Builth and Radnor Shire Horse Society. Figure One shows the location of heavy horse hiring societies in England and Wales in 1939.

The route followed by the Shire Horse stallion hired by the Glasbury Shire Horse Society in c.1970 is typical of the weekly itineraries of such heavy horses (Figure Two). Sometimes a society hired more than one horse, and possibly

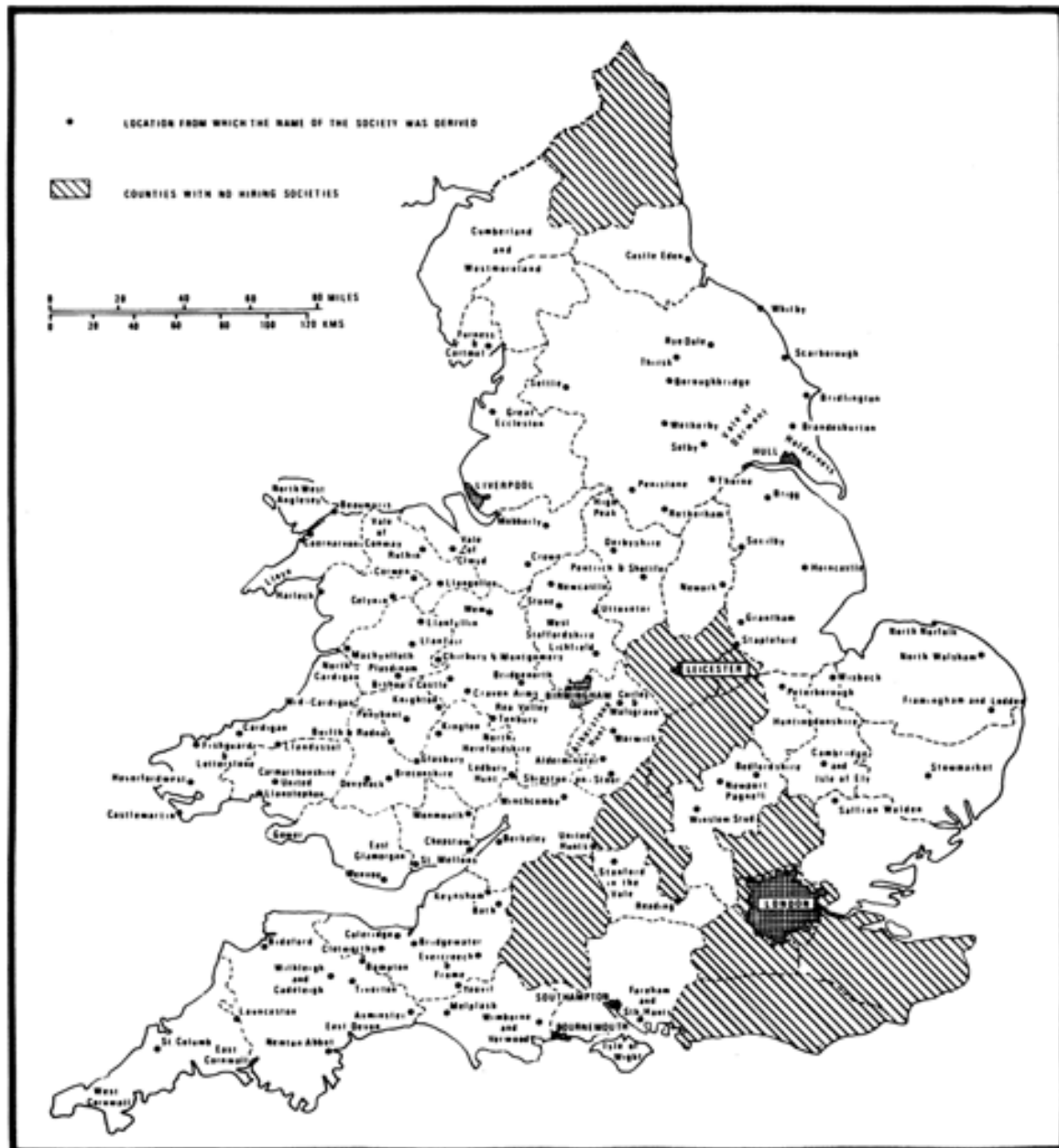


Fig 1:
The location of heavy-horse hiring societies in England and Wales that were aided by government grants in 1939. Source: Chivers, 1976, *The Shire Horse*.

operated more than one route. Additionally, routes were changed from time to time according to the decisions of the committee of the society concerned. In 1935, for example, the Glasbury stallion was based at Boughrood Court but travelled on Monday to Aberedw and Builth, where it was stabled for the night at The Swan Hotel. On Tuesday it travelled to Hundred House, Batch's Common, Gladestry and to Newchurch for the night. On Wednesday the route continued via Rhosgoch and Painscastle to Clyro, where the stallion was stabled with Mr Dykes of Trenewydd, near Boatside. On Thursday the horse walked to Clyro, Hay (where it was fed at The Black Lion), Llanigon and Talgarth (where

it was stabled for the night at The Radnor Arms). On Friday the route continue to Bronllys and Llandefalle, returning to Boughrood Court via Llyswen on Saturday. The horse rested at Boughrood Court on Sunday. Miah Evans of Aberedw led the stallion around this route throughout the season (M. Evans, personal communication).

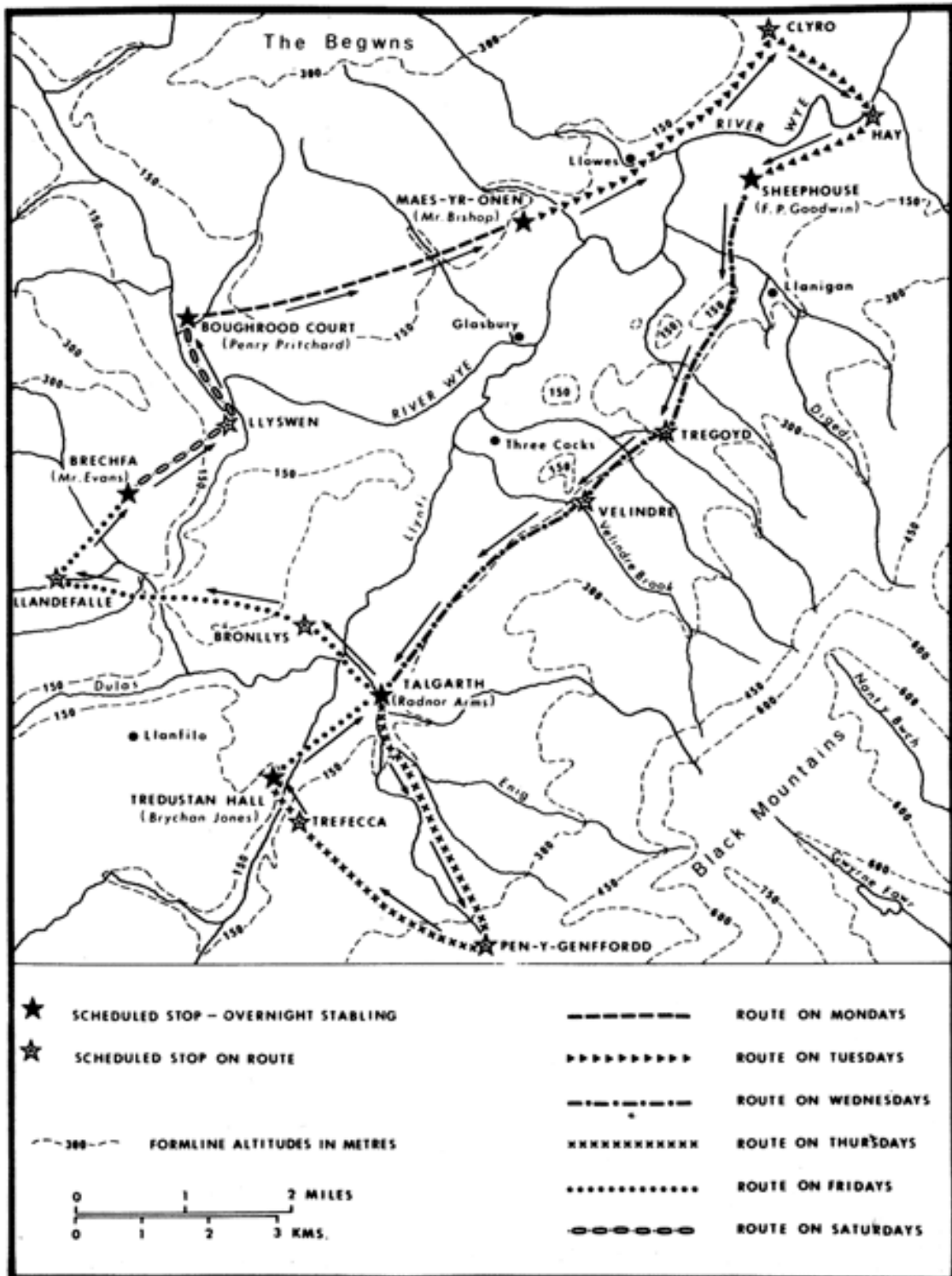


Fig 2:

The main route followed by Shire Horse Stallions hired by the Glasbury Shire Horse Society, 1920s-70s.
Source: verbal information from Alderman P. Pritchard.

Farmers with mares to serve brought those mares to points along the stallion's route, where the deed was duly performed. In order that mare owners should be aware of the routes, stud cards were printed and widely distributed, listing the route concerned and details of the stallion. Notices were also published in local newspapers. Many stallions served over 100 mares in a season, although it was generally considered that a decent horse would serve at least forty mares, and some official attempts were made to limit mares to that number.

In addition to the heavy draught stallions, thoroughbreds and cobs also travelled in Breconshire and adjoining counties. In 1911 the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries for England and Wales established County Light Horse Breeding Committees. These committees undertook such duties as advising on the purchase of brood mares, the selection of stallions to service such mares, the selection (in chosen counties in Wales) of Welsh Cob stallions for the award of premiums, and suggestions as to the routes that should be followed by premium stallions. They also made provision 'For the distribution of free nominations to mares for service by premium stallions' and promoted 'the voluntary annual registration of stallions by owners of stallions of all recognised breeds,' (J.B.A. 1910-11). The committees were dissolved after the introduction of the Agricultural Act in 1920, '... and in their stead a Sub-Committee of the County Agricultural Committee in each county has been appointed to advise the Ministry ... the new Committees will ... assist in the arrangements for service season, 1921.' (H.S.B., X).

It was particularly unfortunate that the first thoroughbred stallion selected by the Brecon Light Horse Breeding Committee, Mr Staien's *Coldstream*, proved infertile. The horse was subsequently sold to a South African breeder, but died while in transit by sea (Staien, n.d.). During succeeding years many thoroughbreds travelled in or into Breconshire. In 1930, for example, *Ragout* visited Hay-on-Wye once a week, while *Lord Hilary* travelled from Carmarthenshire to the Trecastell area (Lewis, 1984).

In 1912 the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries began to award premiums to pony and cob stallions standing for public service at stipulated low fees in England and Wales. This scheme still operates, in modified form, although the awarding bodies are now breed societies, such as the Welsh Pony and Cob Society. New Forest and Welsh Pony premiums were given for stallions enlarged on certain open common areas, where they could roam freely with mares. Premiums for such 'Mountain and Moorland ponies' were only given '... in those districts where the Commons Act of 1908 has been adopted, and local associations have been formed to supervise the rounding up of the ponies and to prevent the use of immature or unsound stallions on the hills or commons' (H.S.B. VII). The first Welsh Pony premiums to be awarded to stallions in Breconshire were in 1913, when five stallions enlarged on the Eppynt were granted premiums. By 1916 there were twelve premium Welsh Pony sires on the Eppynt.

The first premiums awarded by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries for Welsh Cobs were in 1912, although it was not until the following year that a

premium was awarded to a Welsh Cob that travelled in Breconshire. Unlike the premium Welsh Ponies, the Welsh Cobs were expected to travel stated routes.

In 1935 Mr Jones of Bailey Merdy, Brilley, Herefordshire, began to travel a Welsh Cob privately in the area of Breconshire, Radnorshire and Herefordshire: *Paith Flyer II*. The stallion was led by his son, Nicholas. Nicholas Jones was born at Bailey Merdy on 6 June, 1918. His father was a tenant farmer who augmented his living by working as the local castrator. Nicholas went to school at Brilley, a 7½ miles walk each way, between the ages of 5 and 14. At fourteen he began to work whole-time with horses, (N. Jones, personal communication).

Paith Flyer II was a dark chestnut Welsh Cob, number 1538 in the *Welsh Stud Book*, volume XXX. The horse was foaled in 1927 and his breeder was James Scott, Penglanowen, Rhydyfelin, Aberystwyth. When fully grown *Paith Flyer II* was fifteen hands high, and was generally considered to be a 'rangy' type of cob (Davies, 1980). He had Hackney blood on his dam's side (*Danish Applause*).

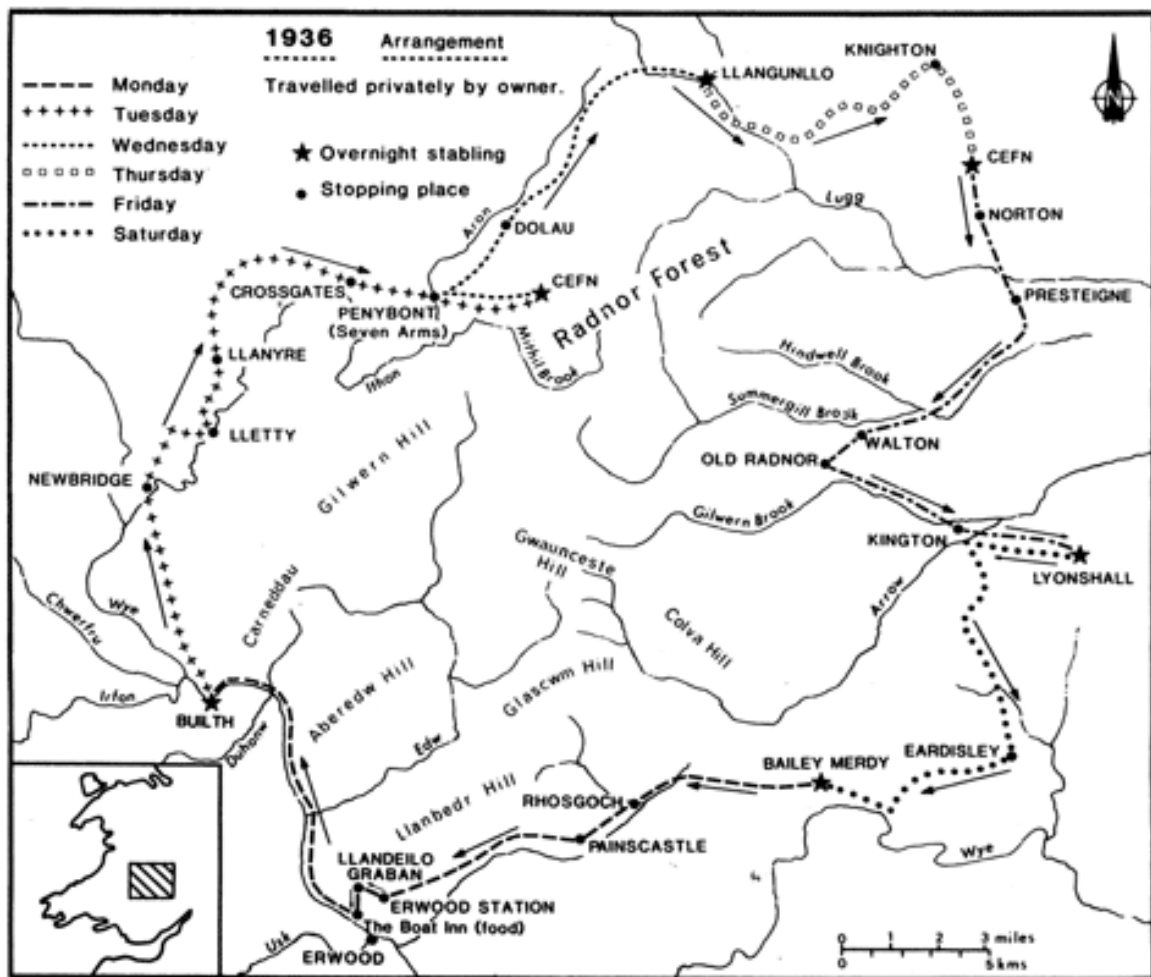


Fig 3: The route followed by *Paith Flyer II*, a Welsh cob stallion owned by Mr Jones of Bailey Merdy, Brilley during the breeding season of 1936.

Source: verbal information from Mr N. Jones, who led the stallion.

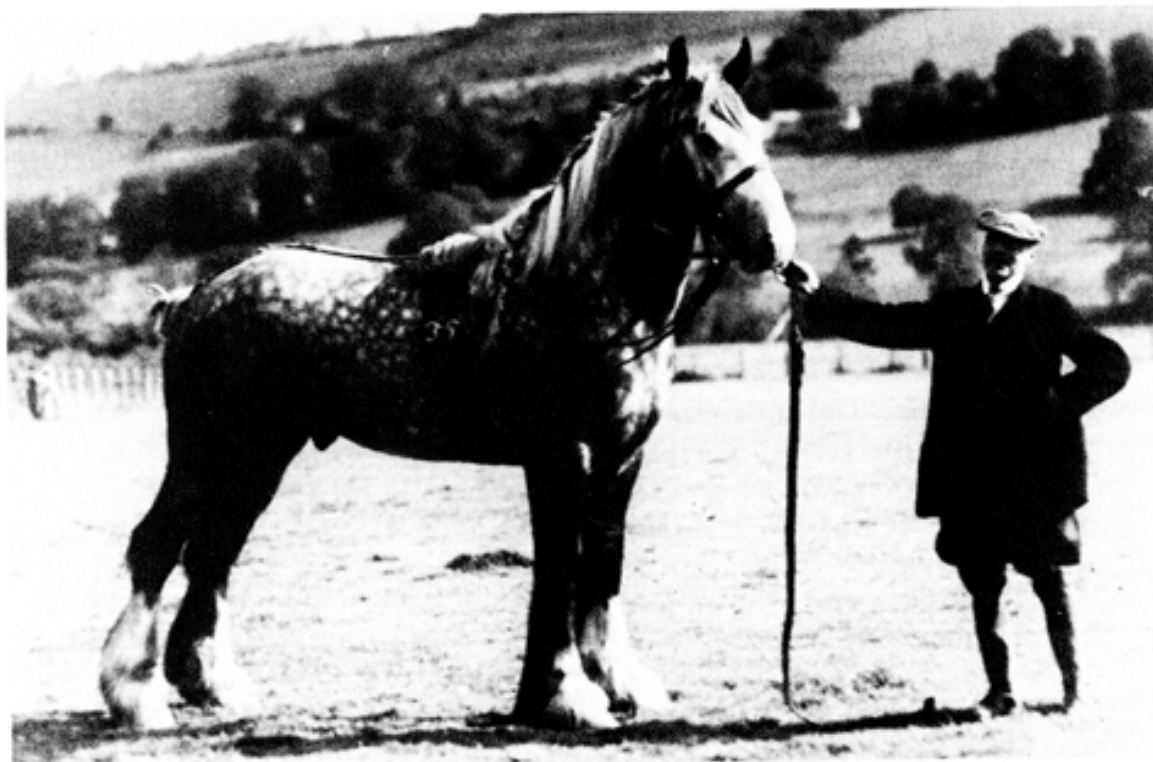


Plate I

Mr Bill Evans of Glasbury exhibiting W. Milner's stallion, *Wenlock Harvester*, c. 1936-1938.



Plate II

Mr and Mrs Jones of Bailey Merdy, Brilley. Mr Jones travelled the Welsh Cob: *Paith Flyer II*, in the Wye valley and adjacent areas in the 1930s



Plate III

Paith Flyer III (right) ridden by Nicholas Jones. This was the Premium Welsh Cob that travelled the Brecon and Radnor area in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The route followed by *Paith Flyer II* in 1935 began and ended at Bailey Merdy, with overnight stops on Monday at Builth, Tuesday at Hundred House (Williams, The Shop), and Wednesday at Walton (Morgan's, The Slurry Farm). The rest of the week was spent at Bailey Merdy. For Nicholas Jones, who was just seventeen years old, this was his first experience of travelling a stallion, (N. Jones, personal communication).

The 1936 route of *Paith Flyer II* was more ambitious than that of the previous year (Figure Three), with overnight stops at Builth, Powell's the Cefn, Vaughan's of Great House Llangunllo, Powell's of Hoes Green Farm Lyonshall, and the weekend at Bailey Merdy. Nicholas led the horse throughout the season.

In 1937 *Paith Flyer II* was awarded a premium by the War Office to travel Radnorshire and Breconshire, which he did on alternate weeks, as shown on Figure Four. The War Office had succeeded the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries as the premium awarding body in 1924. William Meredith of Sunnybank in Glasbury led the stallion during the season. Incidentally, Nicholas Jones married Meredith's daughter, Mary, in 1949.

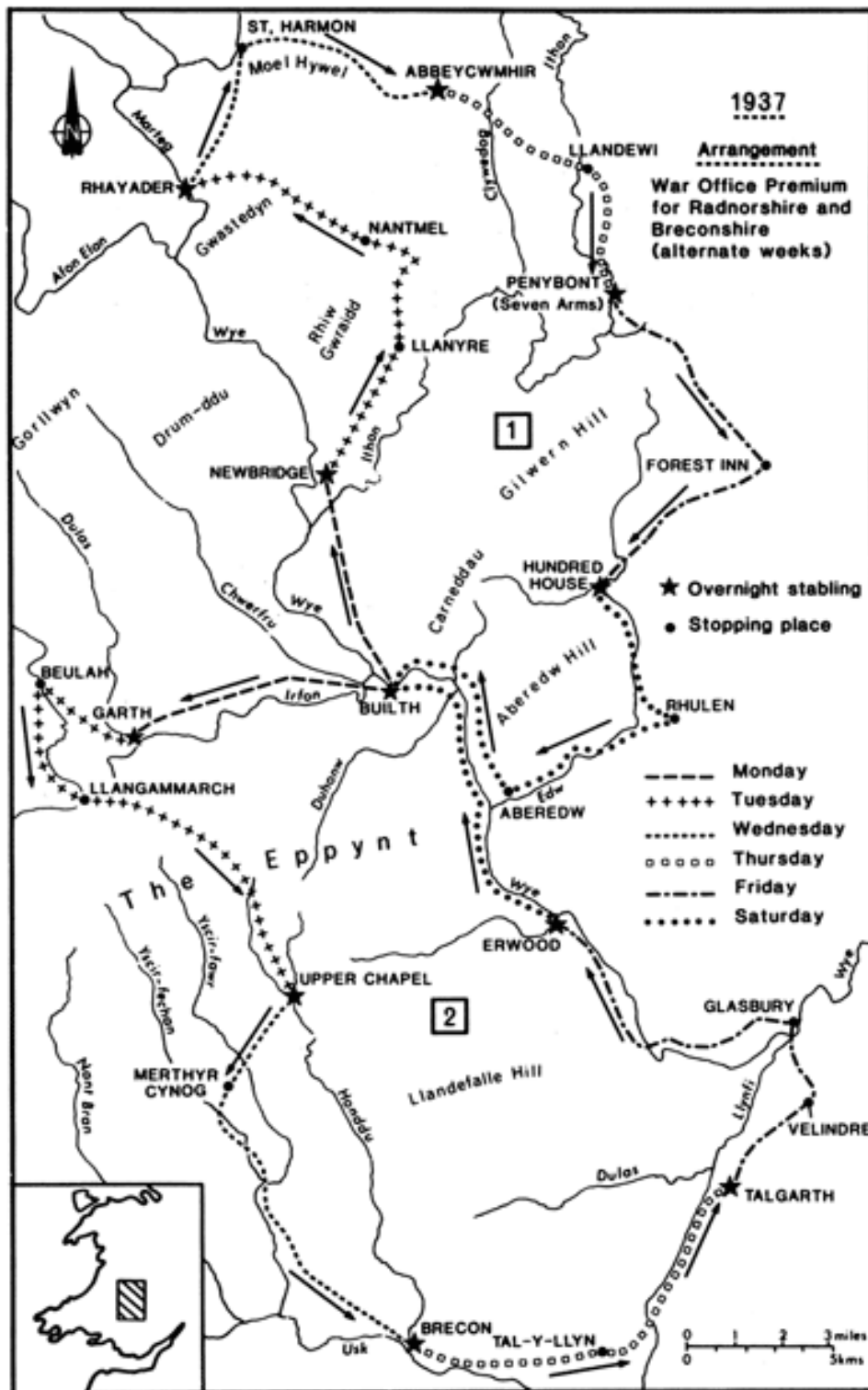


Fig 4:

The routes followed by *Paith Flyer II*, the War Office Premium Welsh Cob stallion for Radnorshire and Breconshire, during the breeding season of 1937. Alternate weeks in Radnorshire (1) and Breconshire (2).

Source: stud notices in *The Brecon and Radnor Express*, April 1937.

During 1938 and 1939 *Paith Flyer II* was awarded premiums to travel in Radnorshire, although Builth was included on the stallion's route (Figure Five). Unfortunately the cob attracted little business, only about twenty mares each year, and his owner began to wonder whether to abandon horses in favour of mechanisation. In 1942 the Jones family replaced their horses with tractors, and *Paith Flyer II* no longer travelled the fertile lands of the Wye valley (N. Jones, personal communication).

Of course, many stallions other than those mentioned above, also travelled in Brycheiniog and surrounding areas. Bill Evans of Dan-y-coed Farm, Aberedw, travelled a Welsh cob between the First and Second World Wars. The Builth Shire Horse Hiring Society used to travel its stallion from Builth to Erwood on Monday (staying at Ynys Wy farm), on Tuesdays via Painscastle to Hundred

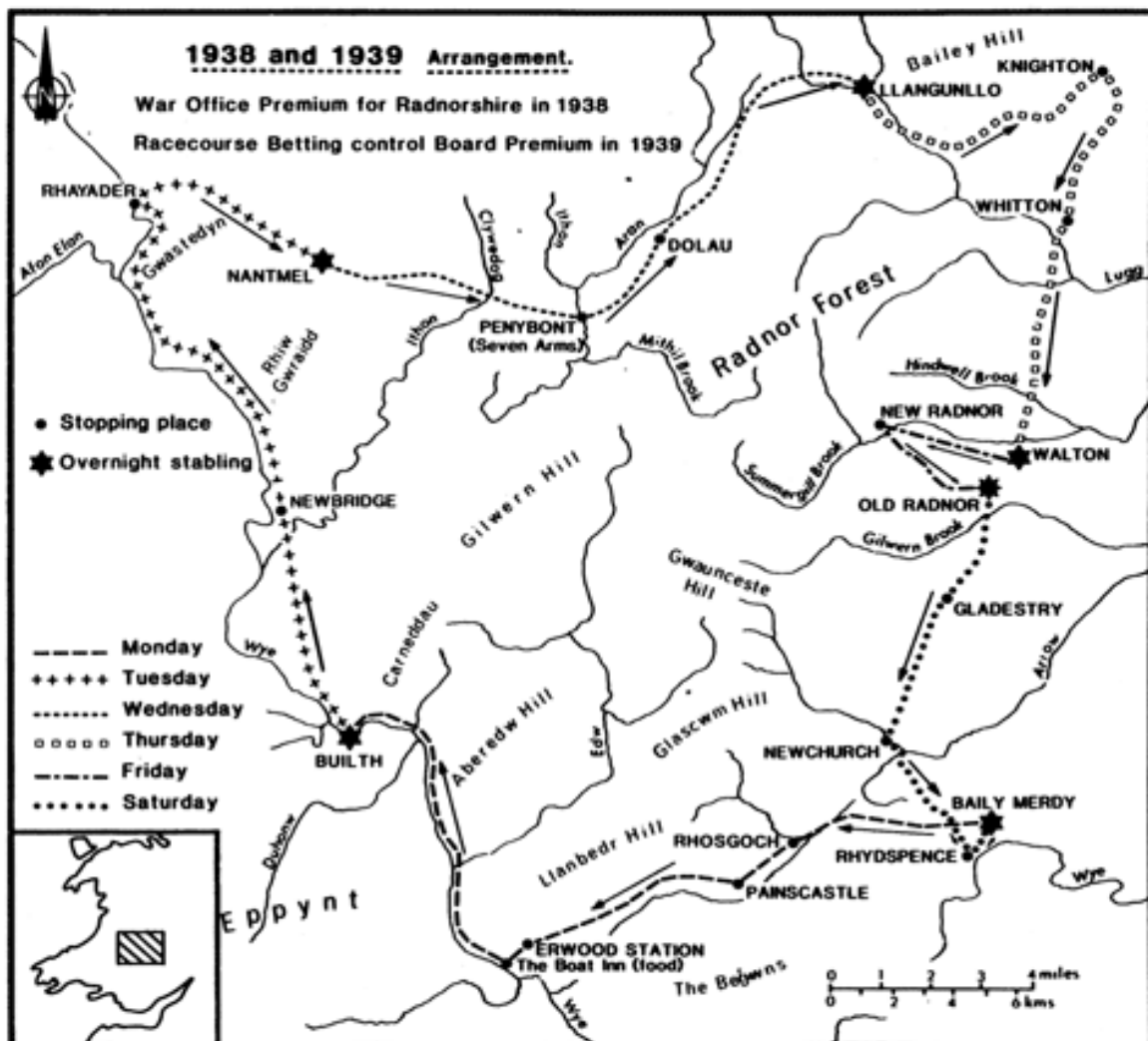


Fig 5:
 The route followed by *Paith Flyer II*, the War Office Premium Welsh Cob stallion for Radnorshire in 1938 and the Racecourse Betting Control Board Premium Welsh Cob stallion for Radnorshire in 1939, during the breeding seasons of 1938 and 1939.

Source: stud notices in *The Brecon and Radnor Express*, April 1938 and April 1939.

House (staying at the pub), on Wednesdays to Penybont, Thursdays to Newbridge, Fridays to Beulah and Saturdays back to Builth (Leslie Davies, personal communication). Similar routes, in terms of length, were also followed by the Devynock and by the Breconshire Shire Horse Societies' stallions, and by the already mentioned Glasbury stallion.

According to Alderman Penry Pritchard, formerly of Boughrood Court, the Glasbury Shire Horse Society continued to travel a stallion until the early 1970s, and this appears to have been the last stallion to have been led for service around the lanes of Brycheiniog. Today the travelling stallions are but fading memories. Nevertheless they used to form an integral part of the agricultural system of Brycheiniog, and indeed of Britain, and their passing, although inevitable, has removed yet another colourful element from our countryside.

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Acknowledgements

The author thanks all the stallion leaders and Honorary Secretaries of Heavy Horse Hiring Societies who, over the years, have spared him their time and revealed their knowledge of the travelling stallion system. He thanks Mrs D. Large for cartographic assistance.

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