

# NEWSLETTER

SEPT 2017

## From the Chair.....

Hi All

The Championship Show is soon & I hope to see lots of you either competing or helping on the day.

I feel that the club is still encouraging & helping riders to reach the goals they have set themselves & hope that you agree. Please do not hesitate to put ideas forward that may be of interest to others.

Something happened today that made me think about how, as horse riders we are perceived by others.

I was driving through Siston & came across a horse & rider meandering along the narrow road. I would have trotted on to the next wide part to allow traffic to pass, but they plodded very slowly along, got to a certain point, on a bend, signalled right & went across the road into the fields. Yes, she said thank you but others would have been very impatient & to be honest I wouldn't blame them.

On the way home, I came across them again, going in the opposite direction. Again very, very slowly, away from the edge of the road in a place where you couldn't pass. The traffic was held up coming towards them & behind, no attempt was made to get to a passing place & by the time I got past there were about 10 cars behind me. I think any other driver would have tried to pass.

I can imagine some of the comments in the other cars. I was thinking trot on for god's sake & I am a rider. I am the first to moan about inconsiderate drivers but this sort of thing is infuriating.

So please wear your fluorescent, be considerate to other road users (except cyclists) & most of all stay safe.

Jane & Pico

## VHPRC

### Winter Dressage Series

#### Dates for your diary:

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017 (Xmas Special)

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2018 -Champs

**We hold our meetings on the first Wednesday of the month**

**FABULOUS FOOD!**

**GRIFFIN INN**

**LONDON ROAD WARMLEY BS30 5JN**

## CAMP JUNE 2017.

What can I say, it was fab as always, and for those of us that went down on the Thursday we found it so much more relaxing and less of a rush, and obviously traffic wasn't so much of a problem as a Friday.

I am sure everyone enjoyed their stay, as usual the food was great, the instructors were Anthony and Anna who are always brilliant and make all the lessons so enjoyable.

There were new log cabins being erected for next year, and they looked fab!! It was Linda's last year of organizing camp, and I am sure that Kathy Hooper will continue to do a super job and Linda can relax and enjoy camp herself.

Kathy has booked a camp for Oct this year at Stonar and every place has been filled, so we wish everyone a good time, and we look forward to hearing all about it, and who knows maybe it could be a regular two camps per year!!

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## ODE WEST WILTS 2/7/17

We had a team attend and what a result they had!! We finished in third position out of fourteen teams, our riders for the team were Stuart Bowler, Annabelle Hurlow, Charlotte Alford, Kathleen Griffith. Summer Garrett & Charlotte also rode as an individual as well.

These guys were amazing and were so close to qualifying, it was a very long hot day and Laura our team manager was there with baby Ethan supporting throughout!! We had a cracking day and were right up there with the winners!!



These guys waited such a long time, it was early evening before the presentation!! so well done for waiting !!

## Style - jumping finals at Hartpury 19<sup>th</sup> Aug 2017

HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THESE GUYS WERE AMAZING AND DID THE CLUB PROUD. TO HAVE JUMPED IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE AN EXPERIENCE. THEY WERE MILLIE FRENCH TERESA GREEN AND KATHLEEN GRIFFITHS WHO TRAVELLED UP TO HARTPURY TO REPRESENT OUR CLUB IN THE FINALS.

EACH RECEIVED A COMMEMORATIVE ROSSETTE FOR REACHING THE FINALS. THEY ALSO RECEIVED MEMBER OF THE MONTH AWARD FOR THEIR ACCHEIVMENTS

WE HAVE COMBINED TRAINING COMING UP ON THE 21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2017 STARTING AT 75CM, PLEASE PUT YOUR NAME FORWARD TO LAURA HAYDEN IF YOU ARE INTERESTED.

## Franklin balls by Sue Hocking

I recently attended a VHPRC committee meeting where we discussed arranging a rally where the trainer uses Franklin balls. Not knowing about this method, I was told that the balls are used to improve rider's position and horse's way of going. I must admit I was rather sceptical and probably did not sound much of a fan. The rally was arranged for Friday 4<sup>th</sup> Aug and having decided I could not criticise something I knew little about I arranged to attend on my mare. Beth Hobbs was our instructor and explained how the balls show where we are the weakest in our position and way of riding, allowing corrections to be made. The balls were used inside the knee to encourage the rider to open more through the hips and under the arms to soften the shoulder and arm, both exercises are very effective. However, the exercise that helped me the most was a double ball, shaped like a peanut. It is placed slightly under the seat bones and the back of the saddle. Initially I felt it tipped me forward, but as I relaxed into it I felt it improved my back posture and encouraged me to use my core in a better way. I then realised my mare was looser through her back, softer and rounder in her outline, the change in her way of going was obvious. I thoroughly enjoyed my session with the Franklin balls and would now encourage riders to give it a try, I was certainly impressed with how it helped my riding... "You are never too old to learn"



Guess who?????

Come on this page is open to any club members!! You can send me your childhood photo, and I promise not to tell. Let the other club members guess who you are??

[Debvickery@live.co.uk](mailto:Debvickery@live.co.uk) or if you are not on line why not send me a photo instead on your mobile.

## JOHN FORD GUEST SPEAKER I am lucky enough to have this man as my farrier!! So although I couldn't be there I knew how much you would enjoy Johns evening

1: This photo I found in one of my late mother's photo albums. This photo was taken in 1948 and shows my father Jim Ford breaking in a young horse using a Dumb Jockey which was made by his father Edward Ford, and was passed onto me by my father in 1967, which I used when breaking in horses unfortunately I lent it to a friend who smashed it to pieces reversing a John Deere tractor over it in 1992. The reason for posting this photo is because of the unique design of this Dumb Jockey. The upper and lower branches of it had strong springs inserted within the wood with a strap and buckle attached which ran over a brass roller to stop the leather chaffing. Reins were attached to the buckles which went through the mouthing bit, which had the same effect as a rider holding onto the reins. We always long Reined off of a Cavesson, and adjusted the reins to suit the head carriage we required, for each horse.

2: To all those racing enthusiastic friends of mine on Facebook, I thought you would be interested to read this entry in the Racing Calendar of March 1955 which I found in my late mother's scrapbook. My father Jim Ford must have entered Gay Donald in this race at Chepstow as well as the Cheltenham Gold Cup (which he won), run in the early part of March 1955. Just look at the weight the handicapper dished out for this horse after winning the Gold Cup. I can't understand why the racecourse authorities didn't just ring up dad to tell him they didn't want the horse running there. Naturally dad didn't run him for obvious reasons.

Video of Gay Donald winning at Cheltenham

<https://www.facebook.com/100002696299881/videos/1093631644070035/>

3: Another photo I found in mother's albums. This shows how skinny and tall I was at the age of eighteen. The photo was taken of me going down to the start at Newton Abbott in 1963 on Falling Spray which was only 16 hands high. I had to make the weight of 11 stone that day, and the saddle weighed only 2 1/2 pounds, we finished second, and then two races later ended up in hospital with a broken collarbone after falling in the three-mile chase.

4: Again sorting through my late mother's treasure trove, I came across this article from a newspaper in 1981 of my sister's tragic hunting accident. I miss her as much today as if it were yesterday, and I'm sure she is still looking out for me every day, as she did all the time she was alive.

5: Me at the tender age of four in 1949, with my father and mother and Auntie Norma, why the hell auntie was dressed up as if she was going to ride in a Point to Point I have no idea.

6: Someone asked to see more of my late mother's treasure trove, which I am slowly going through. This article was in the Irish Independent when I got my first chance ride in a two-mile amateur riders bumper at Mullingar at the age of sixteen. I stopped riding hard about 400 yards from the finish thinking I was an easy third, and got piped on the line in a photo finish, by the greatest chaser in history Arkle who was having his first run as a four-year-old I never looked around again after that experience and rollicking from all connections of the mare Why Worry.

7: Another picture I found in my late mother's treasure trove. Just to show you all, that my early life as a professional jockey wasn't all plain sailing. This was at Stratford-on-Avon in 1965 falling at the last on Melody Man breaking my collar bone.

8: Yet another photo discovered whilst going through a box of records and photos from my late mother's treasures. This is me at 17yrs old still as an amateur, at the third last at Fontwell before winning on Falling Spray. On the inside is the great Fred Winter, in the centre Paul Kellaway,

who finished second and third. I was severely criticised by my dad that day, regardless of the win. I thought I was being clever getting the better ground on the outside, yet dad told me the quickest way was on the rails. I never could please the old bastard.

9: After sorting out thousands of old photos once again, I came across this one when I was fifteen years and two days old. Taken by a press photographer whilst my father Jim Ford and me were walking over O'Connell bridge in Dublin before I was handed over to Charlie McCartney a popular Irish horse racing trainer at the time, for three years as a student national hunt jockey.



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**OBITUARY - MRS. N.S. HAWKSLEY**

Diana Hawksley, an admired and respected member of our Mendip Farmers' Hunt, died tragically in February, aged 38, following a hunting accident. She fell, not jumping the biggest wall on Mendip but, typically, caring for her daughter by taking her on the road round a trappy piece of country.

Diana had hunted all her life, starting with the Blackmore Vale Foxhounds, the Sparkford Vale Harriers and the Wylve Valley. Her father, the late Jim Ford of Chitterne, Wilts., was the trainer of Gay Donald, winner of the 1955 Gold Cup.

Her godmother, Barbara Allen, with whom she worked after leaving school, was Joint-Master of the Mendip for 17 seasons, and it was from Greendown that Diana married Nick Hawksley, now joint-secretary of the Hunt.

Diana had high standards of feeding and turn-out; her tall, elegant figure - toes turned slightly in - made any horse look twice its value.

She was recently secretary of the fencing committee and spent many a Sunday morning repairing other people's damage and building new Hunt jumps. Each spring she regularly enjoyed visiting the Fells and her ability to keep with the huntsman across that steep, rough country became well known.

For several years she had been an exceptionally talented Samaritan in Bath, helping countless troubled people. She was entirely unselfish and always ready to give her time, assistance and valued advice. She will be greatly missed by her many friends and neighbours.

To her mother, Mary Ford, to Nick and their children, all active Pony Club members, we offer sincere sympathy.

Marjorie Stratton



Diana Hawksley: as we shall always remember her.

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# RESULTS FROM MULLINGAR

**3.30**—LOUGH ENEL MAIDEN PLATE of £155; 2nd £38, 3rd £23; qualified riders. Two miles one furlong and 160 yards.

LADY FLAME, b m by Flamenco—  
Another Madcap II (Mrs C Ronaldson), 6-12-0 .....Mr C Ronaldson 1  
KILSPINDLE, 4-11-9

Mr J R Bryce-Smith 2

ARKLE, 4-11-4\* Mr M Hely-Hutchinson 3

WHY WORRY, 4-11-9\* .....Mr J C Ford 4

CYPRION, 5-12-0 .....Mr J Prendergast 5

KING DESMOND, 5-12-0 Mr A Cameron 6

SERVING LINE, 4-11-9 .....Mr K Woods 7

PRUDENT GERTIE, 4-11-9\*

Mr P M O'Rourke 8

HAL'S SON, 5-11-9\* Mr P D McCreery 9

MOTHER COURAGE, 5-12-0

Mr F Flood 10

FIRST OF THE CHEYNEYS II, 6-11-9\*

Mr N Hanley 11

FRENCHMAN, 5-12-0 Mr E D Delaney 12

OLEN'S NUT, 6-12-0 Mr P J Stokes 13

SOLDROPINA, 4-11-4\* Mr D J Hayes 14

PAINTER'S COTTAGE, 5-11-9\*

Mr F J Lacy 15

CARBURY CASTLE, 4-11-4\* (car 11-5)

Mr S Kirk 16

DEERSTALKER II, 6-11-9\*

Mr J P Daly 17

S.P.: 4 LADY FLAME, Hal's Son, 9-2

Kilspindle, 5 Arkle, 6 Mother Courage,

12-2 King Desmond, 8 Cyprion, 10 Serving

Line, 100-7 others. Total 11/6; pl 5/-,

5/-, 6/6.

11; st. Winner trained by C Ronaldson.

Sm 3s.

TOTE DOUBLE. — Athboy and Rouge

Scot, 23 ss. to a 5s. stake. Pool: £698.

One hundred and eighty-four winning

tickets.

Tote dividends are declared to a 2/6 stake.

*Note Arkle 3<sup>rd</sup>*

Tim's shortage of winners, however, is largely due to the fact that his chief supplier of mounts Alec Kilpatrick is in the middle of an unlucky spell with injuries to some of his best performers.

Tom Masson is not the only trainer with a 16-year-old son who has ambitions as an amateur rider. Jim Ford of Salisbury has been coaching his son John, who is now a pupil in a noted Irish stable. He had his first ride in public at Mullingar on Saturday.

—RANDOM.

Backers of favourite doubles (£1 stake) lost £7 at Birmingham yesterday.

*John's 1<sup>st</sup> ride in  
Eire. Beaten in fashion  
3<sup>rd</sup> place by  
Photo finish.*

## TACK SHOP CLUB MEMBERS DISCOUNTS

Did you know you are entitled to special discounts at local tack shops?

Think of all the money you could save!! here is a summary of just some of the discounts available and the contact details;

Chris Puddy's <http://puddys.co.uk/saddlery/> discount 10%

Patrick Pinker's; <http://www.patrickpinker.com/?id=296> -Discount 10%

It is also worth asking if you visit other tack shops, remember always take your membership card with you!!

Please note these discounts do seem to be rather selective and some items are excluded, unfortunately this includes saddles.

happy shopping

## Sheila Bryant guest speaker

Oh what a great evening this was!! Sheila had us captivated with tales of her childhood, having a ride on a horse for the first time which was actually on the way to school, Her first pony named Rupert who won her the pairs sack race with a lad named Charlie and they appeared in the Thornbury Gazette.

Listening to Sheila talk about her life and, reminiscing for all of us with talk of string gloves and oil skin coats. For myself seeing the photos of Sheila on horses which she had produced and then went on to compete, was really impressive and clearly shows what a great talent she had from a young age.

The humour that Sheila described her experiences with is so refreshing with stories of different horses, and their characters one horse sheila spoke of would just lie down when mounted, and one horse that Sue Fewes had taken to Sheila for producing seemed perfect, but they then found out that if it should rain he wouldn't come out of his box .

Sheila went on to event and competed on the big courses and wow those jumps were not for the faint hearted, each horse that Sheila talked about held a special memory for her, and the pride in her voice for these horses was obvious. One photo of a horse Sheila was on, was bred and produced by our very own Kathleen Griffiths.

Sheila still rides and was doing a dressage competition only two weeks ago. Its no surprise that Sheila`s daughter Sally who was phographed on her pony William both as yearlings went on to be as talented as her mother in the saddle.

When our evening came to a close Sheila gave us a song , playing a ukelele sheila entertained us with the chicken talk song, and so much laughter filled the room ! Thankyou again Sheila you're an inspiration!!

Debbie

## SMALL BUT DETERMINED

It's not easy to qualify Shetlands for anything unless it's against other Shetlands. In the past I have competed in coloured classes in CHAPS and BSPA, and my ponies have had to go against ponies up to 14.2 hh.....not an easy task, but at least they are categorised in to native, cob, traditional classes. However I decided this year to compete both Rambo, aged 35 plus, and Willow, who has amazingly turned 15 (when did that happen??), in first round qualifiers for the Veteran Horse Society. Rambo did actually qualify a couple of years ago, by accident, at the Royal London show but unfortunately went unsound in the September so never went- he had qualified for VHPRC as well, and missed that too.

I took both of them to Summerhouse for the Spring festival, both rather shaggy- indeed Rambo rather resembled a yak as he hadn't been clipped after February (as he has Cushings, he has to have at least 3 clips during the winter months). Rambo was in the Diamond section first round qualifier indoors (another slight issue as he is blind and gets a little anxious when in the shadows), and was against 12 other horses and ponies of all sizes, breeds and heights. There were 2 judges. There are no sub categories in these qualifiers, so everything goes in their age groups. He was by far the smallest in the class! He walked and trotted round really strongly- fair to say he towed me round- and then did his individual walk away and trot back. Then we waited for all the others to take their turn. After walking round we were called in to places and I was absolutely amazed and thrilled to be placed second.....this meant I could then enter him in the next Regional qualifier if I could find one close enough to me.

Willow is a mere babe at 15, so he went in the pre-veteran class

There were 19 entries in this class- and again Willow was the only small pony. Same format, and after all had had their turn, Willow was 4th- again really thrilled at our first attempt!

There aren't many Regional qualifiers for VHS in our area, so I picked Bridgend County show at Pencoed in July. It was a good journey and the ring was located quite close to the lorry park so I could swap the ponies around quite easily between classes. This time Willow was first in as he was again doing the first round qualifier. He was in a class of 11 again all types and sizes. Again there were 2 judges. It seemed a very long time walking round waiting for their decision, but I wasn't expecting to be called in 1st.....gobsmacked about covers it! This meant that Willow was now eligible for the next round, Regional, and as per VHS rules, I was allowed to enter him in the later Regional the same day.

We waited an hour or so for the next class, which gave me time to swap them around and get Rambo prepped and sparkling. By now of course he, like Willow, had their summer coats so were much more presentable! Again, Rambo towed me round the ring (he has to be shown in a leather headcollar due to wobbly teeth) and wasn't in the least fazed by the noises of the show round him. It was a good size class of 9 and they all looked fabulous for their ages, all over 25. Having done our show, we walked round waiting to be called in. The first 2 qualify for the Supreme championship, so I mentally had my fingers crossed...but realistic at the same time- he is after all a Shetland.....to my joy, he was called in 1st and qualified. Totally over the moon!

He was loaded on to the lorry and out came Willow again for his Regional. There were 12 in his age group 15-19 and we went through the same routine....with the younger age group the standards are even higher. Most of the horses and ponies certainly didn't look their ages! I really couldn't believe it when we won.....I believe there might even have been a little tear shed! I have had Willow since he was a foal, and there was a time a couple of years ago when I wondered if I would ever get him sound again with all his issues with EMS, and now he had qualified for a Supreme veteran championship.

I had a bit of a dilemma now- I had 2 ponies in the ring championship, and only one handler- me. As Willow had already done 2 classes, I decided to rest him and take Rambo in, just for the hell of it. This was a championship of both inhand and ridden 1sts and 2nds of all the age groups- it was a pretty good sight; a testament to veteran horses and ponies and how well they can stay competing these days. We had to walk and trot round the arena in turn, then line up. The judges deliberated for a very long time, and called the reserve champion which was a large ridden plaited horse ridden by a VHPRC member Lynn Staite, and then the steward pointed to Rambo- he was champion!! I was actually rather stunned but thrilled at the same time- icing on the cake 😊

Both ponies are now entered for the supreme championship- it's at Arena UK at Grantham, Lincs so a huge drive. I will be travelling up and resting the ponies for a day before their classes on Sunday, then travelling back on Monday. They will be stabled together in an indoor stable, so in the event of bad weather Rambo won't be spooked by any noises, and I will make sure that he remains with Willow as much as possible. It's a long way for an old pony. There is the problem that we've had in the past- by September Rambo goes through a stage of not wanting to move. Although his diet remains good, he just doesn't want to move about, let alone trot anywhere! Each year I wonder if it's his last and then, by October, he's bouncing off the walls again!

So having investigated when the key months were for Cushings related issues, I changed his diet last year and ensure that he is clipped by the end of August, so he doesn't overheat in his thick coat. He's had his first clip, and after a couple of worrying days of immobility, he has started walking around again....so fingers crossed for the end of September!! I hope we can do the club proud....but whatever the outcome, my boys are champions in my eyes anyway.

Ros Steward.

## Remind me why we do it ???

So, after the adventures of getting to Cricklands for the dressage, the weekend came for Three Counties, in the middle of the heatwave. We were due to leave mid afternoon. I packed and loaded all my gear (as I was the very important groom!) and the dog's necessities, together with the new airbeds and lots of cold soft drinks.....and told Jess I was just going to nip down to the garage to fuel up while she washed Peach.

Revved up the engine to pump up the air (no problem with the batteries this time!), put my foot on the clutch to reverse out and .....bang, the pedal went to the floor!!! Not quite believing what had happened, I tried again, with exactly the same result.....slowly dawning realisation creeps in...the clutch is gone!

Trying desperately not to panic, I strolled round to Jess to inform her of the problem (won't repeat what she said), and on went my thinking cap. Obviously Sue would have offered to take Peach as she had a space on her lorry, but that wouldn't help as we would have nowhere to sleep- and the car wasn't an option in the heat. So I phoned Deb Vickery.....her phone was answered by a non Deb voice as she was driving to the polo at Celtic Manor! However through the efforts of the passenger Fay, Deb very kindly agreed to lend me her lorry for the weekend, which was just so incredibly kind.

The next obstacle was....find the keys! Clearly her set was en route to Celtic Manor in her handbag, so the hunt was on for the spare set. Fortunately they were located speedily in Sue's barn, which was a relief as Mike, who might have had them, was at an all day farm sale. So I jumped in to go down to the garage to fuel up, turned the key and.....(starting to see a pattern here???) Obviously there was an immobiliser, somewhere! Fortunately Ian was still at the yard, and showed me where this was, so started up and was assailed by a hideous screeching sound! Apparently this was normal- it was the air tanks filling up. Finally fuelled up and got back, and started to transfer all our gear in to Deb's lorry....

We left about 3 in the end.....Peach was such a good girl- didn't seem phased by the new transport- and proceeded to the M5. Upon reaching it, I didn't appear to be able to get the lorry to go any faster than 45 mph.....weird. Jess suggested a limiter but that would have been higher, so we proceeded to Gloucester at a stately 40-45, until stretching my leg I hit the top of the accelerator pedal and we had a sudden surge of speed! Clearly, whereas I rest my heel and press down, I needed to lift my foot higher in order to obtain cruising speed.....so the second half of the journey was considerably quicker than the first half!

We arrived at tea time and were directed into a fabulous shady spot just across from Sue and her team. We off loaded Peach and threw bottles of water over her to cool her down as she was dripping and we didn't want a repeat of the mysterious lumps! Her stable was ready- as soon as the straw was down, she was in and eating, so we could then start to relax.....a can of lager was much needed by this time! Sue identified how the cooker worked, so we were able to have our spag bol.....and after a chat with the others, and Chloe Little who arrived later, we turned in and tried to sleep. This was possibly easier for Jess in the luton, despite the heat....I had a blow up bed in the back, which whilst cool, was a little like trying to sleep on a bouncy castle! First the cushions (yes I had forgotten my pillows) kept sliding off the end, then the sleeping bag also slid off...much to the dog's delight who proceeded to make a lovely nest.....I ended up dozing for about 2 hours on a rubber bed (somewhat sweaty) before the alarm went off at 5 am!

Jess was due in the ring at 8....after a quick re-wash (Peach is such a dirty mare), we were waiting in the collecting ring- we waited literally till the last minute to get jackets on (even the groom has to wear one for Royal International classes) but in she went on time, and after a good go round was pulled in 3rd place (so I took a quick photo as evidence), before she did her individual and conformation bit. Peach was accurate but Jess didn't attempt a gallop (Peach

doesn't really do gallop except on fun rides), so in the final placings they dropped to 4th.....thrilled to bits with that as it was a first attempt- and so close....2nd placed didn't have the card in the ring so the qualifier went to the 3rd place!!

Sue's team were next in the ridden's- Emma on Drummer who was placed 3rd, and Olivia on Alladin who was 5th....all absolutely sweltering by then! All 3 then did the inhands, and after washing the ponies down and putting them back in the stable, we wandered around the stalls to find some drinks, food and a lovely cooling ice cream!

We stayed to watch Chloe in her SSADL veteran qualifier (she was 4th) and then reloaded ready for the return trip (rather faster than the first journey!). Jolly glad to get home- the heat was really beyond a joke by then, so after transferring everything back to my lorry and sorting out the little people, I was so very pleased to get back home for a cold shower. And sleep...in fact Gordon left me in the dark flat out on the settee after I dozed off....I was there all night!

ROS

## WONDERFUL PHOTO'S SUPPLIED BY ROS





## Guest speaker Christine English

MANY THANKS TO CHRISTINE ENGLISH FOR SUPPLYING ME WITH THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION, AND WE ALL THOUGHLY ENJOYED OUR EVENING!! My initial interest in the Alexander Technique was sparked by my desire to ride horses better! I used to work with horse's full time and was highly motivated to improve. I was originally from a non-horsey background and felt I needed to prove that a career working with horses had been a good decision, because it was something I was so good at! So, I tried very hard to do well both in exams and competitions in dressage, show jumping and eventing. I remember being pretty upset when I failed my BHS Stage IV. Luckily for me someone suggested that the Alexander Technique could help. I went for an introductory lesson and I was hooked! I felt so incredibly different after a lesson, so free and light in my body. I could see how my usual way of being was just not helpful for riding. All that trying was translating into muscular tension, which was blocking my horse from moving underneath me. No wonder riding always seemed such hard work! I could only afford to take the odd lesson very infrequently. However, I did arrange to have a lesson the day before retaking my Stage IV and this time I passed with flying colours! I put my success down to being so much better in my body and therefore getting better results from the horses. I'd not had any additional riding instruction. My knowledge on that front hadn't changed, but my riding had changed enormously. I knew there was much more to learn and promised myself that one day when the time was right, I would commit to a course of lessons. I started regular lessons many years later, in 2004, and knew I wanted to train to teach this work. After completing a three-year full-time course, I graduated as a STAT registered teacher of the Alexander Technique in 2007. The benefits I feel from this work have been far reaching and include greater confidence (trust me, I could not have done a talk before!), lower back ache disappearing and feeling less stressed. Most importantly I feel I can help influence the balance of a horse in a positive way, by

being more of a balanced load myself and therefore a help rather than a hindrance. I am passionate about teaching this work to other horse riders not as the answer to all your problems, but as a self-help tool to improve your balance and coordination and therefore your seat. Defining the Alexander Technique (always tricky to define an experience!) So, what is this technique? I described it as being the difference between a tense stiff hollow horse and one moving beautifully balanced in self carriage. We then made a list of what qualities these two horses do or don't have. It looked a little like this:

#### Horse in Self Carriage.

Well balanced (not on forehead).

Soft and supple

Good rhythm

Good movement

Straight

Impulsion

Calm and relaxed

Engaged hindquarters

Willing

#### Hollow Horse

Poor balance (on forehead)

Stiff and disconnected

Irregular rhythm

Poor movement

Crooked

Lacking energy or fast and rushing

Tense and nervous

Hindquarters not engaged

Resistant

We then agreed that the hollow horse was much more likely to suffer with sore muscles and lameness issues. We also agreed the hollow horse was more likely to be in a stressed state, or cope less well in stressful situations. I then asked who suffered with some sort of ache or pain in their daily life. This was definitely most if not all of us! The same was true for who felt "stressed" on a regular basis! It seemed clear to me that most people would have to align themselves more with the hollow horse category! I do indeed feel that most of us move around somewhat like badly schooled horses and my job as an AT teacher is to help you recognise and understand what habits are preventing from using yourself better and more as nature intended. In fact its a bit like Classical dressage for riders!! How a Change in Head Poise Affects All of You We then moved outside for more space and a bit more air, (it was a very hot evening!). The exercise that followed was designed to help you feel and see in others the difference between an exaggerated 'hollow' human and one that is not. The group divided into two lines about 15 metres apart. The instruction was for one line of people to walk up to their partner say 'hello' and walk back. This was then repeated but first the person doing the walking stuck their chin out and pulled their head back into their neck (gently) and walked like this! This caused much hilarity! We then discussed the difference between the two. The 'hollow' human sensed how this affected the whole of their body just by chaining the poise of their head. It could be felt as uncomfortable in the back and niggling an old injury in the neck. It was unpleasant to do and horrible to be approached in this way! The steps were also heavier and breathing restricted, that may have been noticed on speaking with a change in the tone of the voice. We repeated the exercise but this time the walker was hollow to start then let all that go about half way across and returned to 'normal'. For most people this was a relief! I did this to illustrate that we can make changes very easily when we think differently, and that we are all in control of ourselves. However, sometimes we are not entirely aware what needs to change as we have got so used to our regular way of being. So whilst we know we are not massively 'hollow' in the way we played around above, many of us are just a little bit that way inclined without yet realising it. Head Weight and Poll Joint I presented my

head weight (10lbs) to illustrate just how important the way we balance our head is. The weight of the head really is staggering! It just doesn't feel anything like that on us but it truly is that heavy!

You can see how you may only be a little bit off balance but it will always mean the rest of your body is compensating in some way because there will be a downward pressure on the whole spinal column. We all know how when our horse is just a little hollow that it affects their whole body. When we can encourage them to soften and release in their neck, jaw and poll suddenly everything feels softer - their back lengthens and widens and is a whole lot easier to sit on! Small changes can make a big impact. I also talked about the human 'poll' joint and where this is located in us. It is situated much higher and further forward than most people think - its at a level just behind the ear lobe. Turning the head from this point rather than lower down and further back means we are moving more in line with our natural design. This is an example of 'body mapping' which is the study of how we are put together. Its important to know because what we believe will unconsciously affect how we move. Most physical pain is a result of not cooperating with the design of your body. Concentration Verses Awareness - or How to Not Try so Hard! We then had a small group of people form a circle for a ball game - the volunteers were asked to throw a ball to each other so it passed to everyone at least once. After a couple of rounds I asked where people felt their attention was. Understandably it was pretty much exclusively on the ball and that is of course what people were focusing on visually. I then encouraged everyone to get in touch with their peripheral vision, to notice all they could see to the left and right of them without moving their eyes or head. Also to notice all that they could see above and below their eye level and to be aware of the space behind them even though obviously this is something that cant be seen! The throwing and catching was repeated with the aim of staying aware of peripheral vision and refusing to overly focus on the ball. The result was greatly reduced tension as experienced by the group and those of us watching. The circle seemed to open up (although it had not got bigger). There appeared to be more time between each throw and catch. It was less frantic and had more flow. The result illustrates the difference between concentrating hard and expanding your awareness. I explained how this relates to riding when we are often fixing our gaze and putting all our effort into trying to achieve our goals. Being aware of the poise of our head and opening up our vision are cornerstones of the Alexander Technique. It is a way to help us approach our riding without unnecessary tension, just that which is required. It can be a great way to experience doing less but achieving more.

Lessons and Contact At the time of writing this I am in the process of re doing my website, FB page etc They will come under the title of Balanced Rider Secrets - until then you can reach me using the following details: I am available for individual dismounted lessons at my home in Winterbourne Down or lessons on your own horse or on the mechanical horse at the Avon Riding Centre. I hope to be doing some introductory workshops and group courses starting in the Autumn. For more information please contact me on 07808 157836 or email [chrisenglish.alexanderteacher@gmail.com](mailto:chrisenglish.alexanderteacher@gmail.com) It was great to meet you all. Happy Riding!

Chris

## Championship Show Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 17

I am sure everyone will agree it was another great show with some wonderful horses, and ponies on show, the riders and handlers and the animals ranging from very young right upto the veterens.

We would like to thank our sponsors, judges, stewards and especially our committee members and club members who go above and beyond to make a show like this possible!!. It really is a massive team effort, and of course a big thank you to all you competitors that support the show each year with your entries. Also a big thank you to leyland court for allowing us to use your facilities, a great venue!! keep up the good work everyone, and we look forward to seeing you all again next year !!

VHPRC.