**Review of, *Aintree: The History of the Racecourse*, by John Pinfold,(Medina Publishing, 2016). 360 pp. ISBN 978190933971-2, £30 hardback.**

‘For many, perhaps even most people, Aintree means the Grand National meeting and nothing else’ (255): John Pinfold’s handsomely presently and meticulously researched volume shows the folly of such a view. Having watched his first Grand National in 1967, Pinfold is a leading authority on the history of the race as well as the history of horse racing more generally. His latest work is commendably balanced, lavishly illustrated, and written in a most engaging manner. Whilst, quite naturally, individual races and horses garner significant attention, as do changes to the course and the composition of structure – gorse was, for instance, no longer used after 1971 and the core of today’s fences is predominantly made of plastic – this is far more than an anthology of racing.

It is clear from the outset that Aintree has enjoyed richly varied roles, beyond that which might be expected of a racecourse. Today, there is a driving range and a nine-hole golf course that is one of the longest in the UK. Previously, the racecourse acted as the city’s first civilian airport for a brief period in 1924. There are grounds, as Pinfold notes, to suggest that the daily flights from it to Belfast were ‘the first scheduled domestic air services in Britain’ (294) – a claim that would add, once more, to Liverpool’s roll call of national firsts. That one of the country’s first ever female soccer teams used the ground – the Aintree Munitions Ladies – is a welcome reminder that football within the city is neither the sole preserve of men, nor of LUFC and Everton.

During times of war, the expanse of Aintree offered particular scope for being utilised in a number of ways. Aintree’s role as one of the country’s three clearing houses for wounded soldiers during the First World War (some 72,000 wounded soldiers passed through it during the war), as well as its use as an army training ground and munition works, are aspects of the history of the site that receive thorough attention. A similar attention to detail is afforded to Aintree’s role as a temporary camp for, amongst others, French and Polish airmen in the Second World War, before it was taken over by the Americans as a transport camp from 1942. Temporary changes to the course included the installation of 67 showers in the former champagne bar and the assembly of some 16-20,000 jeeps in front of the stands, ‘arriving in kit form … and each taking around four minutes to assemble’ (311).

Individual chapters on, for instance, animal welfare at Aintree, as well as the changing face of racegoers, combine to make the book one that offers a range of social commentaries, both historic and contemporary. For those unfamiliar with the turbulent politics and economics of racing in the mid-twentieth century, this volume also provides a comprehensive overview of concerns as to the course’s viability, reasons for its brief diversification into motor racing (the 1955 British Grand Prix at Aintree featured, amongst others, the Great Train Robbery getaway driver, Roy James), and proposals to sell the course for housing developments in the 1960s. The latter was a process that led not only to a series of ‘last’ Grand Nationals, but also the direct involvement of the then prime minister, the MP for the local seat of Huyton, Harold Wilson. Concurrently, as Pinfold notes, serious consideration was given first by Lancashire County Council and thereafter Liverpool City Council to their purchasing of the course so that Aintree would become a municipal racecourse. *Aintree* thus presents a history that is interwoven into national and local political contexts.

Charting changes of ownership and the redevelopment of what had become, by the early 1980s, a decaying course with facilities in a dire state of repair, Pinfold provides a detailed account of how Aintree Racecourse was rescued first by Ladbrokes and, thereafter, the Jockey Club. It is refreshing that, whilst contemporary, twenty-first-century developments are commented upon, the attention given to them is not at the expense of rigorous historic analysis – in contrast to so many institutional histories. Indeed, my only criticism of the work is that the section entitled ‘Postscript: Aintree Today’ is a little brief.

This a balanced, engaging, and varied history, and it deserves a substantially wider readership than merely those who are interested in horse racing.

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