

ALBERT THOMAS EVANS



A senior citizen of 90 years of age, Albert has worked with and has been profoundly interested in horses all his life – he still has certain views on 'form' regarding some of today's races.

Albert was in the South Staffordshire Yeomanry during the First World War and saw service in Egypt – Cairo, Alexandria and the Nile area. Sitting in his armchair in the conservatory with half-closed eyes, he recollected a certain operation when as 'horseholder number three' a shell killed three of his four horses, but miraculously the horse he was riding escaped, carnage everywhere. Later, in that area

the horses had all gone and it was foot slogging along the banks of the Nile to the objective.

At the end of the war and on demobilisation, his employer, Major Webb – the seed people – met him by car at Kidderminster station and reinstated him as stud groom. There 'Nugget' (his nickname by the Webb family) had 12 hunting horses including the brood mares. Albert maintains that the correct breaking in of foals (a speciality of his) really has to be spread over a whole year.

At the outbreak of the Second World War Albert, a Special Constable, was placed on night duty to patrol the Birmingham aqueduct at Berringham, near Bewdley, this night work lasting for four years.

During the hunting season Albert was second horse, the relief horse for the Master, and attended most of the hunts: All Brighton Woodland, Worcester, Pitchley, Heythrop, Bicester. For five years he was a stud groom at Stratton Audley. A normal hunting day started by rising at 4am, feeding, preparing the horses, then setting off at about 5am. About 1930 saw motorised horse boxes transporting the hunters.

It was in 1958 that he came as groom to Captain Dixon at Castle End where he looked after the hunters and garden. In his early days it was normal for a groom to live in the flat above the stables and have his food in the house kitchen. The wages were £2 a week and he was given two sets of livery a year: high boots, jacket and breeches etc. costing £50. The bowler hat which was worn was specially made and could not dent (a sort of crash helmet) and was purchased from Moss Brothers. The grey jacket was waterproof, as were the fawn breeches. During the grouse season in Perthshire and Invernesshire, Albert was a gun loader and had to dress accordingly (in a kilt).



Being Master of the Hounds was an expensive business and still is, but now is spread and shared with two or three others, the costs to the individual being at least £200 a week.

Nothing was the same after the war – 'the natural enjoyment in your work has greatly disappeared, the job is no longer a vocation and there are fewer people willing to do it!' Reminiscing, Albert recalled how, in a country hunting

house 13 people could be employed: 2 footmen, 1 butler, 1 ladies' maid, 1 cook, 3 kitchen staff, 2 grooms and 2 gardeners. 'Today in many cases the lady of the house does most of the cooking with help, and it's the daily women who clean the house and a girl looks after horses – it's all girls now'.

Son of a farmer, Albert had a smallholding of his own in 1939 where he kept poultry and pigs, but horses were in his blood from the age of 15 when he was apprenticed to a hunting stable and at 17 he was driving a pair of horses and laundau to Worcester Cathedral.

He is keen on bowls but it is 12 months since he treaded the Deddington Green. He still mows the grass at home to help his wife Hilda who is a very keen gardener. They have one son (a schoolmaster), and two grandsons, a quiet and self-effacing gentleman who has served his country in two wars. His love of horses is demonstrated by his care of them and his service to their owners all his working life.

Bill Marshall