

Amazing Horseman

just not sure what name to use

By Alan Parker

Some years ago, whilst compiling lists of the leading trainers and drivers in Perth covering the period prior to the publication of Premiership Lists, the name of Richard Fanning emerged as the leading driver and trainer in Perth in the 1913/14 season.

Traditionally it takes a number of years before a driver has developed the skill required to contend for a premiership but Fanning literally appeared from nowhere in November 1912 winning a heat and the final of a Pony Race at the Claremont Showgrounds.

Less than two years later Fanning was disqualified for life by the WA Trotting Association when they became aware of his past. He rode or drove 33 winners in a little under two years when there were only 56 meetings held with a maximum of six races per meeting during his time in Perth.

He was the leading driver in 1913/14 with 21 winners, four clear of Alfred Fox who had been the leading driver in the previous three seasons and who later became the second Perth driver to pass the 100 wins milestone.

It took some considerable time and research to track down the details of Richard Fanning's previously untold story of an exceptional horseman with a penchant for getting into strife with officialdom both on and off the track.

Reginald Francis Post was born in 1880 in Prebbleton, New Zealand to Charles Augustus and Eliza Maria Theresia Post and was one of nine children born to the couple between 1865 and 1884.

His father was an accountant with a drinking problem and just weeks after his birth Reginald Post was in his mother's arms when she was knocked unconscious by her husband after he returned home drunk.

Eventually the assault charges were settled with Post's father paying his wife a weekly sum and allowing her custody of the children. Charles Post was declared bankrupt in 1890.

Clearly parental control was an issue in the Post family as the brothers Augustus, Charles and Leonard were frequently in trouble with the law from as young as the age of 11 on charges including assault and larceny and were punished with the birch and periods of juvenile detention.

Over the course of his life Reginald Post used a number of aliases including Richard Post, Richard Francis, Richard Fanning and F Evans as he attempted to stay one step ahead of the law and stewards.

Post first came to public notice in February 1896 when he and a friend were charged with training horses in Hagley Park in Christchurch. The charges were dismissed when the magistrate accepted his explanation that he was merely exercising the horses and not training them.

He continued to remain involved with horses while his mother and brothers ran the Wharf Hotel in Woolston.

In December 1902 Post appeared before the Christchurch Police Court charged with uttering a false registration form at the offices of the New Zealand Trotting Association on 16th

October 1901 for a horse called Fancy Free when he knew the horse to be Major Robin.

Fancy Free had won at Rangiora in September 1901 in the name of John Rennie and Post was in the process of transferring the horse from Rennie's name to his own when NZTA officials became suspicious about what purported to be Rennie's signature on the form and on a receipt for the £16 stake.

Post was found guilty and sentenced to three months imprisonment for forging and uttering. He was also disqualified for life by the New Zealand Trotting Association for "ringing in" Major Robin as Fancy Free.

In November 1903 Post sold a trotter called Silver Sash for £35 to trainer William Mitchell. When Mitchell woke the next morning Silver Sash wasn't in her stable.

A Detective Fahey traced Silver Sash to Tasmania where she was racing under the name of Sceptre and promptly arrested Post and made arrangements to have the horse and Post returned to New Zealand.

Post fought tooth and nail to remain in Tasmania but the Court ruled that he be extradicted to New Zealand.

At his trial in August 1904, Post told the court that he had found Silver Sash feeding on the roadside outside his mother's home and, after keeping her on a Woolston farm for some six weeks, he had sold the mare to a Mr King from Hobart for £60 and taken her to Tasmania.

Post was found guilty by a jury and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment.

Whilst fighting his extradition to New Zealand, Post was called as a witness in a Supreme Court action by Benjamin Gooding against the Tasmanian Trotting Association whose stewards had disqualified Gooding's horse Lord Harold for inconsistent performances at Risdon in February 1904.



HURRAH, THE WINNER OF THE TROTTING EVENT AT THE GOODWOOD CLUB'S MEETING, ON FEBRUARY 26

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Post, who had ridden Lord Harold that day when he failed badly in his first start before winning his second, told the Chief Justice that he hadn't been subpoenaed to give evidence and didn't wish to do so.

The Chief Justice ordered Post to give evidence amid allegations that he was disqualified at the time and therefore not eligible to ride the horse.

The Chief Justice told Post there was no evidence he was disqualified and so far as he knew he was an honest man and accepted Post's testimony that he had done his very best to win.

The jury found in favour of Gooding and deemed that the stewards had wrongfully disqualified Lord Harold.

One can but wonder if the Chief Justice and jury had second thoughts when reading the Tasmanian Daily Telegraph the next day as immediately below the report of the outcome of the court case was a line which read "Reginald Post, charged with the larceny of Sceptre, alias Silver Lash (sic), left for New Zealand yesterday in company with Police Officer Lahey (sic)".

After serving his sentence Post returned to Australia and began racing in Victoria under the name of F Evans and he won the trot race at the August 1906 meeting of the Bendigo Jockey Club on a mare called Lady Hamble.

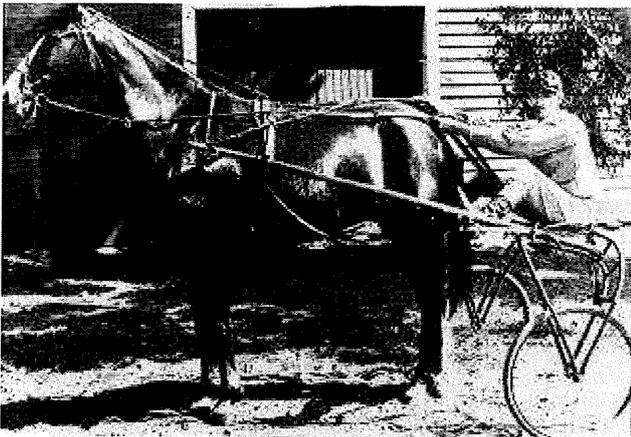
The owner of the second horse Sir Robert, W Kerr, protested on the grounds that the breeding or pedigree of Lady Hamble was incorrect but failed to convince the stewards and the protest was dismissed.

Not satisfied with the lack of action by the stewards, Kerr lodged an appeal with the Victorian Breeders and Owners Trotting Association. Kerr was armed with a written declaration by the owner of the imported stallion Hambletonian Bell Boy, Mr T Hambling, that Lady Hamble was not by that stallion as stated on the entry form for the Bendigo race.

Hambling refuted the claim that Lady Hamble was a 6yo by his stallion from a mare sent from Inglewood. He declared that Hambletonian Bell Boy had served no mares whatever from that district in the previous nine years.

Evans was asked to produce Lady Hamble the following week to the stewards but he failed to appear and the stewards decided to leave the matter entirely in the hands of the VBOTA.

The Border Morning Mail and Riverina Times of 18th October 1906 reported "That it having been proved to this association that the mare nominated as Lady Hamble is identical with the New Zealand mare Amusement, and the owner and rider (F Evans) identical with



Alfred Fox who was Richard Fanning's greatest rival in 1913 and 1914

Richard (sic) Post, who has already been disqualified for life by the New Zealand Trotting Association, the appeal be upheld and the mare Amusement by disqualified for life".

Amusement had arrived in Victoria by a circuitous route having been originally shipped from New Zealand to Hobart and while the New Zealand Trotting Association had advised the Tasmanian authorities of the identity of the horse and those who were involved it appears that a similar courtesy wasn't extended to the Victorian body.

Reginald Post dropped from the radar after the Lady Hamble ruse was uncovered and with another change of name re-appeared in Western Australia six years later when as Richard Fanning he won the heat and final of the Pony Race at Claremont on 16th November 1912 with the diminutive mare Hurrah which raced in the name of Mr J Fanning.

They were Hurrah's first two starts in Western Australia and she was immediately hailed in the press as the fastest pacer in the State although on 27th November The West Australian did muse on the possibility that all wasn't quite as it appeared.

"The handicapper altogether failed to appreciate her worth, but I am assured that her true performances were furnished by her nominator."

Hurrah was the 96th horse registered with the WATA when Fanning lodged her papers on 23rd September 1912 showing her as a 5yo by California from Hush and bred in NSW by J A Buckland.

The WA Trotting Association had been formed just on two years earlier and its isolation and good stakes made it an attractive proposition for Post in an era when communications were primitive compared to the technology now available.

Four months after arriving in Perth, Fanning and Hurrah raced in a trotting event at an unregistered meeting held at Goodwood and as a result subsequent nominations for both horse and trainer were refused by the WATA.

Hurrah won from 390 yards behind at Goodwood on 26th February 1913 and a month later she was offered for sale by auction at the Central Horse Bazaar and was sold to an owner in Victoria.

In light of Fanning's history it is intriguing that some months after the sale of Hurrah, on 29th August 1913, the Daily News trot writer Dan Patch posed the question "Is the mysterious New Zealand horse My Betty identical with the much discussed Hurrah? Is a question frequently asked in trotting circles. Some there are who aver with emphasis the the brands and descriptions are the same".

Richard Fanning was given the all-clear to return to racing in Perth in October 1913 training horses for a number of well-known local owners including WATA President James Brennan and WATA Secretary W G Greenwell.

He won the 1914 New Year Handicap for Brennan with Annie Laurie and three races that season with Miss Satellite for Greenwell on his way to his season's tally of 21 winners.

Fanning's address was 64 Wellington Street, East Perth which is less than 500 metres from the WACA Ground track where the WATA was racing at the time.

It was also the address of one Andrew Maher who registered a stallion called Lord Collingwood in September 1913 and later this horse was transferred to Mrs M Murphy whose address was variously given as 119 Adelaide Terrace or Wellington Street East Perth.

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Fanning trained a number of horses for Mrs Murphy including Boxer, Lord Collingwood and John Redmond. Mrs Murphy had a WATA registered nom de plume of Joe Devlin and both Lord Collingwood and John Redmond raced in that ownership.

Fanning was in the courts again in September 1914 when he and Andrew Maher took action against E A Whittaker to recover the £203 purchase price for Lord Collingwood which they had sold at auction on April 11th that year.

Whittaker reneged on the sale on the basis that the auctioneer, Mr M Murphy, had stated that the horse was sound when in fact it had been injured in January 1914 and was under veterinary care.

The horse was returned to Maher and Fanning and auctioned a second time for 100 guineas some six weeks later this time being purchased by the auctioneer, This transfer was registered with the WATA in the ownership on Mrs M Murphy who subsequently raced Lord Collingwood in the name of Joe Devlin.

The court ruled against Whittaker and ordered him to pay Maher and Fanning £105 pounds being the difference between the two auction prices.

While this court case was proceeding Fanning was suddenly disqualified by the WA Trotting Association who had become aware of his previous life disqualification in New Zealand and took action to reciprocate with their New Zealand counterparts.

Fanning continued to advertise Lord Collingwood as a stud stallion to selected mares at a fee of four guineas from the 64 Wellington Street

address but in December 1914 he left Western Australia although Lord Collingwood remained in Perth and eventually finished up in the stables of Fred Thomas.

Fanning returned to Tasmania in 1915 where he began to train and drive under the name of R Post until his past again caught up with him.

The Sydney Sportsman of 1st March 1916 reported that "It transpires that R Post who has been driving at trotting meetings in Tasmania for some time, is identical with one R Fanning, who had been disqualified by the New Zealand Trotting Association. Post, some years ago, resided in Maoriland, and when the Tasmanian Association was advised by the New Zealand Association about the matter it was learned that Post and Fanning were one and the same".

The Tasmanian Trotting Association reciprocated and Post was again disqualified although it was for less than 12 months as in January 1917 the Tasmanian Association issued Post with a full licence.

He again began training and driving, this time with his son R Post Jnr, and he again imported a number of horses from New Zealand after visits to his homeland.

This time he stayed out of serious trouble with the stewards although in 1923 he was fined £2 for striking a fellow driver with the whip in retaliation for being struck himself during a race.

Reginald Francis Post died in Tasmania in January 1942 and was cremated with his ashes placed in the Wesleyan section of the Cornelian Bay Cemetary. ■



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Thursday, 6th of October 2016