

‘Newmarket that infamous seminary of iniquity and ill manners’: Horses and Courts in the early years of George III’s reign.

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This article explores the role of different types of equine culture, haute école and horse racing, in the turbulent politics of the early years of George III’s reign. It suggests that opponents to Lord Bute politicised the racecourse, and in particular Newmarket, in order to challenge the men and measures of the court of St James’s. Indeed race-meetings could, and often did, serve as venues for conducting negotiations and intrigues, and enthusiasm for racing or for the manège could mediate political alliances. Horsemanship, in short, could function as politics by other means.

Newmarket has been a centre of courtly activity since the reign of James I. Whilst the enthusiasms of individual monarchs for the charms of the turf may have ebbed and flowed – and Newmarket’s fortunes with them – the links between the court and this small town in Suffolk have endured across four centuries.¹ The Rowley Mile, home to the one of Newmarket’s two racecourses today, is named after Charles II’s favourite horse. Indeed, Charles II’s enthusiasm for racing was such that it almost cost him his life, for the Rye House Plot was only thwarted by the king’s premature return from the races.

The court had a physical base in the heart of Newmarket until 1857. Inigo Jones completed The Prince’s Lodgings for Charles, Prince of Wales between 1618 and 1619,² and William Samwell designed a new palace for Charles II completed in 1671.³ Known as Palace House, and now home to the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art, this complex provided a royal base throughout the eighteenth century, and was used actively by

¹ For Newmarket’s royal history, see: R.C. Lyle, *Royal Newmarket* (London: Putnam, 1945); Richard Onslow, *The Heath and the Turf: A History of Newmarket* (London: Barker, 1971); Laura Thompson, *Newmarket: From James I to the Present Day* (London: Virgin, 2000).

² John Harris, ‘Inigo Jones and the Prince’s Lodging at Newmarket’, *Architectural History*, 2 (1959), pp. 26-40.

³ Simon Thurley, ‘A Country House fit for a King: Charles II, Winchester and Greenwich’ in Eveline Cruickshanks (ed.), *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), pp. 214-239; idem., ‘Newmarket Palace’, *Country Life* (24 April 2008), pp. 100-103.

William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland throughout the early years of his nephew, George III's reign. Newmarket, as a court outside of London, provided an alternative space for politics and sociability, and had developed a reputation to match.

In 1773, Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield died. A year later his daughter-in-law, Eugenia Stanhope published the letters written to her husband, and Chesterfield's illegitimate son, Philip. Eugenia and her husband had been largely left out of the Earl's will in favour of his godson Philip Stanhope, and so to recoup some of their losses, Eugenia sold the copyright of Chesterfield's letters to the publisher James Dodsley for 1500 guineas. Chesterfield's will, serialised in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, attracted widespread comment, especially for the conditions placed upon his godson:

In case my said godson Philip Stanhope shall at any time hereafter keep, or be concerned in the keeping of any race horse or race horses, or pack or packs of hounds, or reside one night at Newmarket, that infamous seminary of iniquity and ill manners, during the courses of the races there, or shall resort to the said races, or shall lose in any one day at any game of bett whatsoever the sum of 500l. then and in any of the cases aforesaid it is my express will that he my said godson shall forfeit and pay out of my estate the sum of 5000l. to and for the use of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster for every such offence or misdemeanour.⁴

In the same year, Horace Walpole wrote from Strawberry Hill to Sir Horace Mann in Florence, lamenting the state of the nation:

⁴Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters written by the late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to his son, Philip Stanhope, Esq; Late Envoy Extraordinary At the Court of Dresden*...4 vols. (Dublin, 1774-5), iv, postscript.

What is England now? A sink of Indian wealth, filled by nabobs and emptied by Maccaronis! A senate sold and despised! A country over-run with horse races! A gaming, robbing, wrangling, railing nation, without principles, genius, character or allies; the overgrown shadow of what it was!⁵

This article explores the importance of horses and horse racing as a lens for analysing the political upheavals caused by the accession of George III to the throne in 1760. That Walpole could lament of the proliferation of races, and Chesterfield ban his godson from Newmarket, hints at the pervasive influence that horse racing – both as a site of politicking and a symbol of a dissolute governing class – had on the relationship between the new court of George III and a political class energised by the fear of the royal prerogative during the first decade of his reign. What is striking in exploring this turbulent decade, and its legacy into the 1770s, is the extent to which Newmarket, the small Suffolk town at the centre of the horse racing industry, became a symbol of, and shorthand for, a perceived malignity at the heart of government.

Of crucial importance in this decade of political change was the figure of Lord Bute. This article contrasts Bute's interest and enthusiasms for a particular form of equine culture known as haute école with the dedication to horseracing at Newmarket (and other venues) that was shared by many of his political opponents, in particular those clustered around the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham. Rockingham was one of the masters of the turf in the 1760s, and disturbed by the hand of the new king in government assumed a heightened political role during this decade of turmoil and change, he and his political allies politicised the racecourse

⁵Padget Toynbee (ed.), *The Letters of Horace Walpole, 4th Earl of Orford*, 16 vols (Oxford, 1905), viii, p. 308.

to create a significant, and understudied, extra-parliamentary space; one which challenged the men and measures of the court.

The convening power of the racehorse remains a significantly underexplored aspect of eighteenth-century social, cultural, political and economic history. Mike Huggins' *Horse Racing and British Society in the Long Eighteenth Century* has recently filled a notable lacuna in existing scholarship,⁶ and this article seeks to augment Huggins' wide-reaching analysis with a focussed case study exploring horses and courts in the early years of the reign of George III. In so doing, this article augments and adds texture to Huggins' analysis, and suggests further avenues for research.

Serious scholarly consideration of the importance of horses and horse racing during the eighteenth century has been slow out of the starting gates.⁷ 'Historians', as Carl B. Cone observed in 1975, 'have not concerned themselves with the connections between politics and racing'.⁸ Biographical entries in the *History of Parliament* or *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* have a tendency to consign a politician's enthusiasm and interest in horses and horseracing to their private lives, assuming little or no connection with their position in public life.⁹ However, racing was an essential part of the structure of politics by the middle of the eighteenth century at local, regional and national levels, and was understood as such by

⁶ Mike Huggins, *Horse Racing and British Society in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2018), passim.

⁷ With the notable exception of the work of Richard Nash, see, for example: 'Turf Wars: Violence, Politics and the Newmarket Riot of 1751', in Alexis Tadié and Daniel O'Quinn (eds.), *Sporting Cultures 1650-1850* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2018), pp. 93-113; and 'Sporting with Kings' in Rebecca Cassidy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Horseracing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 13-25.

⁸ Carl B. Cone, 'Parliamentary and Racing', *The Historian*, 37:3 (1975), p. 407.

⁹ See, for example, the entry for Augustus Fitzroy, 3rd Duke of Grafton, which notes of the political discussions surrounding the change of administration in 1765 that, 'Though Grafton and Cumberland had had several contacts in recent months, both in political matters and at Newmarket, Grafton was not one of the principal members of Newcastle's circle': Paul Durrant, 'Fitzroy, Augustus Henry, third duke of Grafton', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/9628>, accessed 20 March 2018).

contemporaries. As John Brewer has noted, ‘the advent of a Newmarket meeting could play havoc with party politics’.¹⁰

Peter Borsay’s work on eighteenth-century urban development set the parameters for historians’ understanding of the role of horse racing, outlining how the sport was ‘the most rapidly developing and commercially orientated of eighteenth-century physical recreations’.¹¹ The sport enjoyed a period of unprecedented growth in the first thirty years of the eighteenth century, before a period of rationalisation and consolidation which, whilst decreasing the number of race courses (from 138 in 1730 to 70 by 1760), increased the volume of recorded winnings by 1760 to £35,000 per annum, two and a half times the amount in 1730.¹² Newmarket was the pinnacle of the racing world. It was the only course with multiple race meetings each year, and by the decade upon which this article focusses, over half of racing’s prize-money was awarded on the heath. Significantly, Newmarket did not develop the wide-ranging social infrastructure of assembly rooms and grandstands that characterised the race week at York. Newmarket’s first public stand was only completed in 1876, and viewing was for the entire eighteenth century the preserve of those on horses, in carriages, or aristocrats with access to small viewing platforms.¹³ Racing at Newmarket thrived on personal proximity and the tradition of the high-stakes match race, which was a tradition that had royal roots deep in the previous century. Racing’s royal connections during the Stuart and Williamite monarchies have been well-rehearsed by scholars. What has not been previously

¹⁰ John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 59.

¹¹ Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1991), p. 181.

¹² Ibid., pp. 182-183.

¹³ For a recent history of racing at Newmarket, see: David Oldrey, Timothy Cox and Richard Nash, *The Heath and the Horse: A History of Racing and Art on Newmarket Heath* (London, 2016), pp. 6, 173-194.

noted is the extent to which this royal endured in the 1760s, not through the incumbent monarch but through his uncle, George II's younger son, the Duke of Cumberland.¹⁴

Free boroughs, by contrast, that had races could expect their incumbent Member of Parliament and prospective candidates to subsidise the prizes. Iris Middleton's study of the development of horseracing in Yorkshire shows how at Beverley, the local MPs made well-publicised donations during election seasons.¹⁵ The same was true for county seats. Edmund Burke's letters are replete with references to the races, 'where I did not go, you may be assured', he wrote to his political master, Rockingham, 'for the sport. It was thought the pulse of the country would be felt there'.¹⁶

At a national level, political direction in the 1760s could be decided as much at Newmarket or York as it was at Westminster or St James's. In a decade where politics was personal, and aristocratic factions eddied and jostled for position, proximity mattered. Newmarket, with its race meetings falling between April and November, was especially useful given that parliament was not normally in session, and potential political allies had returned to their country seats. Hence, the years of political turmoil from 1762 to 1764 were referred to by *The Annual Register* in 1765 as 'Westminster Races'. The October meeting in 1762, for example, was reported as a match race between the three most prominent politicians of the year for George III's favour:

¹⁴See, for example, a newspaper account of the Duke of Cumberland 'and several persons of distinction [who] were present at Newmarket for three matches' in 1761, when 'after the sport was over the whole company dined with his Royal Highness at the King's Palace at Newmarket': *The General Evening Post* (London) (14-17 Nov. 1761).

¹⁵Between 1748 and 1749 MPs Charles Pelham and Sir Charles Codrington contributed sums of up to £30: Iris M. Middleton, 'The Developing Pattern of Horse Racing in Yorkshire 1700-1749: An Analysis of the People and the Places' (Leicester De Montfort University, PhD thesis, 2000), p. 53.

¹⁶Harold J. Laski (ed.), *Letters of Edmund Burke: A Selection* (Oxford, 1920), p. 185.

Lord Bute's *Favourite* (the noted Scotch stallion) won the king's plate; beating Mr. Pitt's famous horse *Guide* (who had won several plates in different parts of England) and lord Temple's bald faced mare, *Moll-Gawky*.

Betts before starting – *Favourite* against the field.¹⁷

The idea of 'Westminster Races' has significant longevity throughout the eighteenth century, for example, Richard Nash has drawn attention to its use in 1708, and Cruikshanks would deploy the idea again in 1784.¹⁸ If political historians have been slow to consider the importance of racing for both the functioning of, and satirical comment on, politics, greater strides have recently been made in exploring the role of horses and horsemanship in creating masculine and English identities. Donna Landry has drawn attention to the 'ideology of free forward movement as an enactment of and analogy for political liberty and imperial adventuring',¹⁹ whereby aristocratic self-fashioning found an outlet in the breeding and training of thoroughbred horses. Or, as Frederick St John, 2nd Lord Bolingbroke wrote to the Armenian activist and adventurer, Joseph Emin in 1759:

As I have no Kingdoms to conquer, I hope you will excuse my amusing myself, with so trifling thing as a Horse & that you will not wonder at my wishing you to send me a True Well bred Arabian. I had rather have one, than any kingdom in the world.

¹⁷'Westminster Races', *The Annual Register, or a view of the history, politics, and literature, for the year 1764* (London, 1765), p. 128. Temple was known by his nickname of Squire Gawky, see: Joan Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda: Monuments and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (Montreal: McGill-Itica University Press, 2006), p. 163. For a nuanced engagement with racing infused satirical cartoons from later in the decade, see: Don Nichols, 'Jockeying for Position: Horse Culture in Poetry, Prose and *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*', in Sharon Harrow (ed.), *British Sporting Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Abingdon, 2015), pp. 125-152.

¹⁸ Richard Nash, "'Honest English Breed": The Thoroughbred as Cultural Metaphor', in Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (eds.), *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline and Identity in the Early Modern World* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 245-272.

¹⁹ Donna Landry, *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture* (Baltimore, 2009), p. 4

I am in great hopes we shall both have our wishes. I, my Arabian Horse, You, your kingdom.²⁰

Monica Mattfeld, through her analysis of horsemanship manuals, has likewise emphasised the importance of the horse in shaping notions of appropriate masculine behaviour. The manège, for example, was by the accession of George III, ‘no longer the ideal embodiment of honourable masculinity but a symptom of unregulated consumption and social corruption’.²¹ This article suggests that Newmarket as both a physical site, and a literary trope, could serve as a means of shoring up aristocratic identity through small group homosociability, whilst simultaneously offering those excluded from these select groups a means of criticising a perceived decline in moral values and politeness.

Politicking took place against the background of a popular press that firmly associated Newmarket with vice, dissolution and effeminacy. In a letter ‘To Mr Town’, first published in *The Connoisseur* in 1755, the correspondent reflected on a growing epidemic of suicide and ranked the likely causes in order of popularity:

Of Newmarket Races

Of kept mistresses

Of electioneering

Of lotteries

Of French Claret, French lace, French cooks, and French disease

²⁰BL Add MS 79500 fo. 23-2: Bolingbroke to Joseph Emin (1 Sept. 1759).

²¹Monica Mattfeld, *Becoming Centaur: Eighteenth-Century Masculinity and English Horsemanship* (University Park, PA., 2017), p. 56.

Of White's

Of Chinese temples²²

Newmarket was the corrupting influence that led young men down a path of indolence and vice. In 'Travels of a Guinea', a coin is:

dispatched, in company from some bank-notes, to a gentleman who made a great figure in the opposition, and was by him carried to Newmarket: there I often changed masters, and by turns became the property of a country 'squire, a general, a sharper, a lord, a bully, and was by the latter given to country fellow to prevent a drubbing: by him I was given to a lady of pleasure, and by her to a surgeon, in order to repair some breaches love had made in her constitution.²³

The jostling class uncertainties and proximity to gaming and whoring that caused the Earl of Chesterfield such anxiety in his will were writ large across the periodical press. Newmarket was a stop on the road to despair and ruin. Tom Heedless in *The Edinburgh Magazine*, a fictional rake representative of aristocratic dissipation, inherits £4000 a year, moves to London, hires a large house, an extravagant equipage, drinks hard, gambles excessively and keeps two mistresses. 'In less than a year and a half his estate was mortgaged to discharge some debts of honour, and in six months after absolutely sold, to repair the devastation he had suffered at Newmarket'.²⁴ The destruction of the family estate and good name was the eventual and traumatic end point for those lured by Newmarket's charms. Another dissolute nephew, following the narrative arc of Sarah Scott's *Millennium Hall* (1762), who inherited

²²'To Mr Town', *The Connoisseur*, 50 (1755), p. 300.

²³'Travels of a Guinea', *The Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (1758), p. 227.

²⁴'Essay on the Appellation, Life', *The Edinburgh Magazine*, 6 (1762), p. 439.

his uncle's fortune, after hiring a magnificent house in Grosvenor Square (where the Newmarket habitués Lords Rockingham and Grafton had their London houses),²⁵

soon became one of the most constant frequenters of White's; kept several running horses; distinguished himself at Newmarket, and had the honour of playing deeper, and betting with more spirit, than any other young man of his age. There was not an occurrence in his life about which he had not some wager depending. The wind could not charge, or a shower fall without his either losing or gaining by it.²⁶

Newmarket's reach inspired poems and extended to the London stage. James Boswell, reflecting on his own less than auspicious debut at the Jockey Club's Newmarket coffee house, composed *The Cub at New-Market*, 'while [Garter] Stars reflecting Phœbus' light/ With beamy radiance struck his sight'.²⁷ *The Elopement*, which debuted at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in April 1763 featured a Mr Thoughtless, who unsurprisingly preferred the company of Newmarket jockeys and the hazard table to his wife, but was happy to spend her considerable fortune.²⁸

These literary outputs, of varying quality and impact, were humorous at an individual character level, but sought to make broader statements about the potential impact on society

²⁵'Grosvenor Square: Introduction', in *Survey of London: Volume 40, the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 2 (The Buildings)*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London, 1980), pp. 112-117. (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol40/pt2/pp112-117>, accessed 3 November 2018).

²⁶'A Description of Millennium Hall', *The London Magazine, or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, 31 (1762), p. 604.

²⁷James Boswell, *The Cub At New-Market: A Tale* (London, 1762), p. 15. See also: Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell* (New Haven and London, 2000), p. 71.

²⁸ William Harvard, *The Elopement* (http://www.eighteenthcenturydrama.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/HL_LA_mssLA223, accessed 21 Oct. 2018).

and public morality when the nation's leaders could 'condescend so low as to wear the foulest Plebian garb',²⁹

As on Newmarket heath, where slaves
Converse with peers, and peers with knaves.³⁰

Newmarket was positioned as the corruptor of the nation's leaders and a fundamental threat to the balanced constitution of king, lords and commons. *The Edinburgh Magazine* cautioned that 'if our legislators should be either weak or corrupt, the evils of the state would become incurable, because the disorder would be rooted in the remedy itself':

What a figure would a member make in the legislative body, who had studied the laws of Newmarket more than the laws of his country? While you were talking of Magna Charta, or the bill of rights, his thoughts perhaps would be running upon Sweepstakes and Match'em: if you was to mention our colonies abroad, he would wonder what monsters you were speaking of, and would probably amuse himself with calculating the odds for Whistle-Jacket against Driver.³¹

This was a generational phenomenon. The target of press invective – men like Rockingham and Grafton – turned 30 and 25 respectively in 1760, and were set to inherit the mantle from an aging and increasingly decrepit group of politicians clustered around the Duke of Newcastle.³² Newmarket, as presented in the periodical press, destroyed judgement and

²⁹*The Royal Magazine*, (1764), p. 200.

³⁰*The Edinburgh Magazine*, 5 (1761), p. 483.

³¹'The necessity of a learned education for Men of Fortune', *The Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (1758), pp. 174-5. By the following year Rockingham owned Whistlejacket and would have him painted by Stubbs in 1762.

³² See, for example, Dr Messenger Monsey's letters from the period, which document his clients' (including Newcastle) frequent ailments: BL Add MS 79497-50.

moral obligation, acted as a solvent on class distinctions, and posed a severe threat to the successful governing of the nation through its influence on this next generation of leaders. These themes swirl throughout a poem, *The Modern Jockey*, published the month before peers and politicians made their way to Newmarket for the October 1762 meeting.

My Lord, upon Newmarket course,

Whips, spurs, and bears the straining horse:

Dost thou not think it somewhat odd,

To see a peer upon the sod;

His family and rank debase;

(To family and rank disgrace)

Shake hands with rascals, thieves and sharpers?

(‘Tis said, they’re much the same at A-----r’s)

To bring clear off – clear – not a guinea,

Won’t you pronounce him then a ninny?

Think him or sensible or crazy,

He cares not – *Fashion* makes all easy.

While Madam Prudence truckles under,

And Wisdom gazes, struck with wonder,

To see the Chieftains of the Nation,

Thus serving Villany’s probation;

Nay, less perplex their patriot brains

With making laws, than guiding reins;

And study more to win an heat,

Than shine in senatorial seat.³³

The short-lived premiership of John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute (1762-1763), provides a helpful case study for exploring the relationship between different political tribes, and how this could be expressed through their equine interests. As Donna Landry has argued, the eighteenth century saw a transition towards ‘a new language of equine reasonableness and a loosening and lightening of control’, whereby men and women ‘sought to represent themselves as superior in civilisation by riding lightly and exerting control by means of a silken thread’.³⁴ Stephen Deuchar likewise suggests that the sporting art of the 1760s, in particular the work of George Stubbs, offered a carefully calibrated statement about his patrons’ – Richmond, Rockingham, Grafton, Grosvenor—integrity and ability to rule.³⁵ It was these men, who clustered around Newmarket, who felt their natural position at the head of government to be threatened by Bute. The suspicion of Bute as the royal favourite was further added to by his interest in *haute école*, which confirmed to his opponents his perceived absolutist tendencies.

John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, was a political phenomenon. His actions – both real and fictional – left a lasting legacy across the terrain of mid-to-late eighteenth-century politics. Bute owed the launch of his political career to the racecourse, and his entrée into court circles at Egham races was often described by later commentators. Frances Boscawen described to the political memoirist, Nathaniel William Wraxall, how rain had stopped racing, and in order to amuse Frederick, Prince of Wales, it was proposed to play a game of cards:

³³*The Universal Museum; or, Gentleman's and Ladies Polite Magazine of History, Politicks and Literature for 1762* (1762), pp. 518-519.

³⁴Landry, *Noble Brutes*, p. 4.

³⁵Stephen Deuchar, *Sporting Art in Eighteenth-Century England. A Social and Political History* (New Haven and London, 1988), pp. 107-108.

but a difficulty occurred about finding persons of sufficient rank to sit down at the table with him. While they remained under this embarrassment, somebody observed that Lord Bute had been seen on the Race Ground; who, as being an Earl, would be peculiarly proper to make of the Prince's party.

Bute, as Boscawen related, dutifully played cards with the Prince, whilst his original companion, an apothecary in whose carriage he had travelled to Egham, left the racecourse.

The Prince was no sooner made acquainted with the Circumstance, than he insisted on Lord Bute's accompanying him to Cliefden, and there passing the night. He complied, rendered himself extremely acceptable to their Royal Highnesses, and thus laid the Foundation, under a succeeding Reign, of his political elevation, which flowed originally in some measure from this strange contingency.³⁶

For later commentators, reflecting the political upheavals of the 1760s, caused in a large part by Bute's relationship with Frederick's son, the future George III, this unorthodox meeting could be interpreted as laying the foundations for improper influence. In fact, Bute's visit to the racecourse was exceptional for his enthusiasms lay in a different form of equine culture to the turf.

Bute's enthusiasms lay in the riding house rather than on the racecourse. In fact, Bute's visit to the racecourse was exceptional for his enthusiasms lay in the riding house rather than on

³⁶Nathaniel William Wraxall, *Historical Memoirs of My Own Time. Part the First, from 1772 to 1780. Part the Second, from 1781 to 1784*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (London, 1815), vol. I, 431-432.

the turf; his real fascination was with *haute école*: the complex series of movements and display now known as dressage.³⁷ This was a courtly form of riding more closely associated with continental absolutism than with the ‘free forward movement’ described by Landry. He shared this enthusiasm with his school friend from Eton, Thomas Worsley of Hovingham Hall, and the two men maintained an epistolary friendship throughout Bute’s rise to power and prominence. Both built riding houses at their estates at Mount Stuart, Highcliffe and Hovingham respectively,³⁸ and passed on this enthusiasm to George III, succeeding, ‘where the [first] Duke of Newcastle had failed with Charles II and inculcating a genuine love of *haute école*’.³⁹ The surviving riding school at Buckingham Palace bears architectural witness to this success.

From Bute’s elevation to Groom of the Stole in Prince George’s household in 1756, through his appointment as Privy Counsellor and Secretary of State for the Northern Department in October 1760, to his eventual rise to First Lord of the Treasury in May 1762 and his short tenure during negotiations for the Peace of Paris, the attentions of those writing to Bute turned increasingly to matters of patronage, preferment, pensions and places, with horses frequently acting as bargaining chips. In June 1757, Lord Eglinton wrote to Bute regarding a horse he felt ‘will do vastly well for you, he is not extremely beautiful but has the finest action I ever saw in any Colt in my life’. He then telescoped politics and horseflesh together, informing Bute that:

³⁷ Raber and Tucker, *The Culture of the Horse*, p. 9.

³⁸ Francis Russell, *John, 3rd Earl of Bute: Patron and Collector*, p. 179; Giles Worsley, ‘Hovingham Hall, Yorkshire – I: The Seat of Sir Marcus Worsley’, *Country Life*, 188:37 (1994), p. 92. See also, idem, ‘Hovingham Hall, Yorkshire – II: The Seat of Sir Marcus Worsley’, *Country Life*, 188:38 (1994), pp. 56-61; idem., *The British Stable* (New Haven and London, 2004), passim; and Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the Country House, 1660-1880* (London and New York, 2000), pp. 337-340.

³⁹ Giles Worsley, ‘Riding on Royal Approval’, *Country Life*, 118:18 (1994), p. 58. See also, Richard Nash, ‘William Cavendish: Riding School and Race Track’ in Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham (eds.), *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity in Seventeenth-Century England* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 317-330.

I am at last determin'd [sic] to part with all my horses and turn Politician if therefore your Lordship knows of any of your new friends who want to be mounted I beg you will recommend my case.⁴⁰

Eglinton would benefit from Bute's support, becoming a gentleman of the bedchamber in 1760 and a Scottish representative peer in 1761, as part of the loose coalition of MPs and peers known as the 'King's Friends'.⁴¹ His enthusiasm for horses was satirised by John Home, Bute's private secretary in 'An Epistle to Lord Eglinton', where the poet sought a replacement for his horse, Piercy, 'bending beneath a weight of years':

My humble wish does not Aspire
To steed of Andalusian fire;
Such as brave Bute delights to ride,
When *Cortes* feels his master's pride.

Unable to restore Piercy's youth through 'Medea's magic art', Home is left to depend on Eglinton:

Thee I intreat, Olympic Lord!
Whose deeds Newmarket strains record,
Find me a steed without delay,

⁴⁰Mount Stuart Archives BU/98/2/89: Lord Eglinton to Lord Bute (25 June 1757).

⁴¹Andrew Mackillop, "Montgomerie, Alexander, tenth earl of Eglinton (1723–1769), politician and agricultural improver." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. May 25, 2006. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 21 Oct.2018, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19055>>

Such as a poet's purse can pay.⁴²

Significantly, knowledge of Bute's enthusiasm for Spanish horses was not just limited to his private secretary. William Home, eighth Earl of Home – who was closely connected with Bute's uncle, the 3rd Duke of Argyll – was Governor of Gibraltar from 1757 to 1761.⁴³ Home wrote:

I have done every thing in My power to get a Couple of Horses for your Ldp but without success. I went to the great Fair where I find there is no choice there are several brought in here but I think they are all Brutes, I have however ventured to send a Colt only rising four Year Old as Capt Montagu of the Monorque which sails tomorrow is so good as to carry him.⁴⁴

Home was determined to 'show you that I could not neglect any Comission [sic] you honor'd me with', encouraging Bute to look at another Spanish horse recently imported, and reminding him that 'if your Lp would have me send over any more I shall do the best I can'.⁴⁵

Thomas Worsley, likewise, was eager to put horses in front of Bute, writing in 1759 that:

I have taken the liberty to enclose a list of part of my horses, purely to raise a smile, & to give myself the opportunity of addressing you, & telling you how I wish, I could

⁴²*A Collection of Original Poems by Scotch Gentlemen* (A. Donaldson and J. Reid, Edinburgh, 1762), pp. 231-232.

⁴³Thomas Henderson, revised by Stuart Handley, 'Home, William, eighth earl of Home (d. 1761)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13649> [check access to this online resource]

⁴⁴Mount Stuart Archives BU/98/3/98: Lord Home to Lord Bute (20 June 1758).

⁴⁵Mount Stuart Archives BU/98/3/70: Lord Home to Lord Bute (25 June 1758).

have the pleasure of settling some of them before your eyes, young ones with high spirits & long tails, I was near saying I would give the best of them for a few hours of your company, I think I could please you, if supple shoulders & nimble haunches could.⁴⁶

Worsley had provided Bute with his prized Spanish horse Cortez and expressed his concern that as Bute's responsibilities increased he would not:

entirely abandon Cortez, for I think he will be of infinite use, to inspire that true equanimity so necessary to all who [are] busy, or [have a] great part to act. His temper, courage, & other good qualities might be a constant lesson to many who want them, if they had the luck to have such a monitor, & the sense to profit by such a noble example.⁴⁷

Bute and Worsley shared a language of horsemanship that prized those horses able to perform in the riding house. Worsley recommended a mare to Bute, which had been intended for Prince Edward, noting that, 'next to Cortes', she will be 'one of the pleasantest things you ever rode, nimble, [a] spirit, & a sensibility which is everything to a true cavalier'.⁴⁸

In addition to Worsley, Bute maintained a correspondence with the other leading figures in the riding house world. Henry Herbert, 10th Earl of Pembroke, had joined Bute in George's new household as a Lord of the Bedchamber. Pembroke, by his own admission was 'horse

⁴⁶Mount Stuart Archives BU/98/3/216: Thomas Worsley to Lord Bute (undated [1758]).

⁴⁷Mount Stuart Archives BY/98/3/66: Thomas Worsley to Lord Bute (17 June 1758).

⁴⁸Mount Stuart Archives BU/98/3/217: Thomas Worsley to Lord Bute [1758].

mad',⁴⁹ and supplied Bute with additional dressage horses.⁵⁰ Richard Berenger, who would publish *The History and Art of Horsemanship* in 1771, felt that he owed his position as Gentleman of the Horse in the Royal Stables entirely to Bute:⁵¹

I have so lively a sense of your goodness to me, that I can never cease to look up to you, as the author of my Happiness, and as such, to consider myself as accountable to your Lordship for every step and action of my life, and particularly for every circumstance that may be relative to the Employment which by your generosity and favour I have the Honour to Hold.⁵²

Bute was one of 'but a very few persons who have stood forth' as *haute école's* 'avowed friends and protectors' alongside George III, to whom Berenger gave credit for the revival of riding school techniques.⁵³

For Bute's opponents, however, his riding style could be interpreted as yet another sign that 'all power was quickly hastening to the hands of Lord Bute'.⁵⁴ It became an article of faith amongst the old Whig families that Bute had corrupted the king's mind, and was steering him on a tight rein towards centralising the power of the monarch at the expense of the hereditary

⁴⁹ John Screen, 'Herbert, Henry, tenth earl of Pembroke and seventh earl of Montgomery', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13034>).

⁵⁰ See BU/98/2/107 (31 July 1757) and BU/98/2/110 (5 Aug. 1757).

⁵¹ 'The stables: Gentleman of the Horse', in *Office-Holders in Modern Britain: Volume 11 (Revised), Court Officers, 1660-1837*, ed. R O Bucholz (London, 2006), p. 605. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/office-holders/vol11/p605> [accessed 21 October 2018].

⁵² Mount Stuart Archives BU/98/5/211: Richard Berenger to Lord Bute (23 December 1760). It is likely that Berenger also taught Bute's children to ride, see: BL Add MS 59438 fo. 132: Lord Bute to Richard Berenger [No Date].

⁵³ Richard Berenger, quoted in Giles Worsley, 'A Courtly Art: the history of 'haute école' in England', *The Court Historian*, 6:1 (2001), p. 45.

⁵⁴ William Reynell Anson (ed.), *The Autobiography and Political Correspondence of Augustus Henry, 3rd Duke of Grafton* (John Murray: London, 1898), p. 15.

political class. The Duke of Newcastle, who had been replaced by Bute as First Lord of the Treasury in May 1762, was convinced of his need

to be Instrumental, in a proper way, and as a Gentleman, to relieve the Publick, & My Friends, from the Haughtiness, & power of an absolute Scotch Minister, Ignorant of Business, & unacquainted with the Necessary Qualifications of an English Minister.⁵⁵

Writing from Claremont, and cast out from the heart of government for the first time in over a decade, Newcastle attempted to marshal the response of the grand Whig families to Bute's position. In so doing, the sixty-nine-year-old duke found that he was writing to a younger generation of men busy using the racecourse as an alternate site for politics. The thirty-two-year-old Marquess of Rockingham hinted from the October meeting at Newmarket that, '*the conversations I have had here have been in a Good Stile & I am in Great Hopes that the Proof will be as Good as the appearance*'.⁵⁶ Later in October, with further machinations at court, Newcastle wrote once more to Rockingham at Newmarket:

What does all this mean?

What will our Friends in Yorkshire say to this?

Was anything of this Kind suspected at Newmarket?⁵⁷

Yet Rockingham remained aloof. A week later, Newcastle wrote once more, almost pleadingly, 'by your silence, I hope, you are coming up to us, after your Newmarket meeting'.⁵⁸ Rockingham had certainly been busy at the October meeting, for he was one of

⁵⁵BL Add MS 32929 fo. 91^v: Duke of Newcastle to Earl of Hardwicke (7 October 1762).

⁵⁶BL Add MS 32929 fo. 146^r: Marquess of Rockingham to Duke of Newcastle (10 October 1762).

⁵⁷BL Add MS 32929 fo. 200^v: Duke of Newcastle to Marquess of Rockingham (14 October 1762).

⁵⁸BL Add MS 32929 fo. 341^v: Duke of Newcastle to Marquess of Rockingham (21 October 1762).

the nineteen signatories to an agreement ‘for the greater Conveniency of distinguishing the Horses in running’ that allocated colours to each owner. The Duke of Cumberland headed the list with a regal purple, followed by the soon to be victims of what Sir Lewis Namier would call Bute’s ‘Massacre of the Pelhamite Innocents’, including the Dukes of Devonshire and Grafton, and the Marquess of Rockingham.⁵⁹

The contemporary periodical press understood the significance of Newmarket. In 1764, the *London Magazine, or, Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer*, published a handy guide to the runners and riders that looked back over the political terrain of the early years of George III’s reign. In 1762, for example:

Lord Bute’s *Favourite* (the noted Scotch Stallion) won the King’s Plate; beating Mr. Pitt’s famous horse *Guide* (who had won several plates in different parts of England) and Lord Temple’s bald-faced mare *Moll-Gawky*.

In 1763 the runners and riders lined up for the ‘King’s Plate’ – otherwise known as battle for the Treasury precipitated by Lord Bute’s resignation from office – with each aristocrat, or aristocratic faction anthropomorphised in equine form. For example:

Charles Townshend’s horse, *Trimmer*, ran on the wrong side of the post.

Mr Pitt’s bay horse, *Guide*, was in training for this match, and expected to enter at the post, but went off.

⁵⁹Lewis Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution*, 2nd edn. (London, 1961), pp. 403–415; Peter D.G. Thomas, *George III: King and Politicians* (Manchester, 2002), pp.78–79. There is only one reference to Newmarket throughout Thomas’s book, clearly indicating his perception as to the lack of importance that horse racing had in the 1760s.

Great expectations from Lord Shelburne's Colt, but he ran resty; and 'tis supposed he will not start any more. Some knowing-ones, who had backed him for a considerable sum, were taken in deep.⁶⁰

The Duke of Grafton heartily embraced this characterisation. For the Newmarket meeting in October 1763 he invited Earl Gower, among others, for political talk 'made chiefly up on Jockeys'.⁶¹ For contemporaries, therefore, there was no such division between politics and racing as we might suppose, and the summer of 1765 saw a new outpouring of racing-related political puns. Charles Lloyd's pamphlet, *A Critical Review of the New Administration*, located the emergence of this new political group – the Rockingham Whigs – to the racecourse, noting:

The Ministry is composed of Men who have, and of Men who have not appeared in public Life. To the latter of these I do not mean to reproach their insignificant Obscurity, but this certainly prevents their having the Esteem of Voices of a Nation to whom they are absolutely unknown. Even their Names would never have been heard, except they had been found in that List of Statesmen, the *New-market* Calendar. We there read, that sometimes the Duke's *Herod*, sometimes his *Driver*, have beaten Lord Rockingham's Trifler, or Gimcrack.⁶²

A one-sheet broadside, *City Races*, took a more sympathetic tone to Rockingham's potential elevation to First Lord of the Treasury, stating:

⁶⁰'Westminster Races', *London Magazine, or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, vol. 33 (1764), p. 253.

⁶¹Cone, 'Parliamentary and Racing', p. 411.

⁶²C. Lloyd, *A Critical Review of the New Administration* (London, 1765), pp. 28-29.

Lord *Rockingham* 's wall-eyed horse MERCATOR: This Horse, tho' aged, is a Maiden one, having never started for a Plate; he bears training exceeding well, and comes thro' his exercise much to the satisfaction of those who have seen him; he was got by the famous Horse COMMERCE, well known for having won a great many Plates, but by unskilful Jockies is now scarce able to stand on his Legs: This Horse is in high favour with the Gentlemen of the Turf.⁶³

It seems fitting then, that as Sarah Bunbury related, 'Ld Rockingham, the D. of Grafton, & Genl Conway kissed hands the day Gimcrack ran'.⁶⁴

This article has argued that historians have tended to overlook the connections between mid-eighteenth-century politics and equestrian culture that participants in both understood so well. The factions occasioned by George III's intervention into politics provided satirists and commentators ample opportunity to reinforce the links between the turf and politics. Whilst George III, Lord Bute and Thomas Worsley were engaged in the design and construction of the riding house at Buckingham House (completed by 1764),⁶⁵ Newmarket re-emerged as an alternative centre for politics, one to which George III and Lord Bute – with their shared passions for haute école – had limited access. Enthusiasm for 'riding the great horse', and for Spanish imports, was definitely on the wane. Historians have only scratched the surface in terms of the calibre of politicking carried out at Newmarket. John Chapman's *Plan of Newmarket* (1768) names eleven noblemen who owned racing stables scattered throughout

⁶³*City Races* (London, 1765).

⁶⁴ Countess of Ilchester (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox, 1745-1826* (London, 1901), pp. 172-3.

⁶⁵David Watkin, *The Architect King: George III and the Culture of the Enlightenment* (London, 2004), pp. 56-59

the town,⁶⁶ and with no more than twenty-five years separating the oldest and youngest noblemen this was ‘an exceptionally close group of friends and rivals with mutual interests far closer than any country community of the mid-eighteenth-century’.⁶⁷ As such, racing still has much to reveal about the ways in which the convening power of the thoroughbred enabled and encouraged extra-parliamentary debate and political intrigue.

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⁶⁶The Dukes of Grafton, Ancaster, Kingston, Bridgwater, and Northumberland, the Marquess of Rockingham, the earls of Eglington, March, Orford, and Gower, and Viscount Bolingbroke.

⁶⁷C.P. Lewis, ‘John Chapman’s Maps of Newmarket’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 80 (1991), p. 75.