**DALTON Richard**

**Introduction for the recording and the transcript.**

This recording is part of the oral history project carried out by the Suffolk Horse Society in 2013 with advice from Cambridge Community Heritage, and a generous grant from the Heritage Lotteries Fund.

In the recording you will hear the voice of Mr Richard Dalton describing his memories of the Suffolk Punch heavy horse.

Richard is farm manager and head horseman at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum in Norfolk.

The recording was made by Juliet Pennell, a member of the Suffolk Horse Society.

The date of the recording was 22nd July 2013 and it was carried out at Gressenhall Museum

The duration of the recording is about 19 minutes.

Richard Dalton

Juliet This is Juliet Pennell interviewing Richard Dalton, for Working Horses, Working Lives; Sharing our Stories of the Suffolk Punch, on Monday 22nd July, 2013.

Richard It is Richard Dalton speaking. I am the farm manager here at Cressinghall Museum. I have been 24 years, I am 49 now, and prior to my work here I also worked at Acton Scott for four years in Shropshire. When I came here it was basically the buildings and the land, and my role was to stock the farm, and to bring it to life in conjunction with the displays at the museum. But when I was looking, doing the research, it was to actually have the live stock that were relevant to East Anglia, especially Norfolk, and my selection of horse was the Suffolk Punch. Because of the great association with actually its work throughout East Anglia. When I first came we looked around... Well I looked around and made contact with the Suffolk Horse Society, the secretary then, Mr Philip [?] Davis, we went down to Holsey Bay, and I was lucky enough then to go out and have a look at the young stock they had, and select my first two horses, which was ‘Zebadee and Zulu’ and they... I bought them back up here in 1989 and then started working them in that autumn and winter, prior then to us actually opening the farm the following spring.

Juliet And can you tell me how big is the farm here at Cressinghall?

Richard The farm is just under 50 acres and its er.. in conjunction with the workhouse. The workhouse is the main dominant feature on our site and this farm and the area has been farmed as a farm, of this size, since 1250. So we are still farming it and when I first came it was just an open field, prior to the use by the museum, it had been part of the Norfolk County Council small holdings, and had been farmed as such for many years. And then before that by the guardians of the workhouse and before that, it was then in ownership, and going right back through its... It goes back and recorded in the Norfolk Records Office, the original [?DeStotfield family] way back in time. So when I looked at it, to get the field pattern so we could demonstrate the [?2.36] four course rotation, I used the 1813 Enclosure map for this farm, to reintroduce the hedgerows, which are now big and bushy, and dividing the farm, to give it some integrity, so we can relate to maps. Then we can use that then, by having the four course rotation, to farm it and again using the horses to do the farm work. So in a year we plough them, sow the crops, tend the crops, cultivate between rows etc., and actually then use the binder to harvest the crops, wagons to bring it in. We still then thresh the corn, at the end of the year with a steam engine.

Juliet Now you have got more than two horses to accomplish all this work. Could you tell us a bit about the horses you have got on the farm now, and how you chose them?

Richard The original two were fantastic horses, and we built up... we started off small and had a magic team for many years. I lost one, and you realise then gosh you need another one coming on all the time. So I then got a mare ‘Queenie’ and she was a really good horse, she worked locally on a dray ride, unfortunately had an incident on the roads with her, and she was spooked by that. But I put her to work here and within two or three weeks she was working on the fields. And in fact, after one magnificent rear and a buck and was on the binder for the first time, and then just walked round the rest of field, and did... years of good service. We had another horse called ‘George’, he came via Roger Clarke in Suffolk. Then I have also got two others that I bought young horses over time to get enough horses coming through, ‘Trojan’, ‘Bowler’. They were youngsters and they are now... they are my old boys now, and as well I’ve got ‘Casper’ and ‘Reg’, who erm... they came from a friend of mine up in Scotland, who was changing his farming policy. He was hoping to work them, and then... So they moved back down from Mull, back down to Suffolk, and the up to us here. Then I have got the young horse ‘Jimbo’ who was bred locally in Norfolk. So it gives me a range of horses, a range of ages, a range of abilities, so we can deliver our working side of things as well as delivering to the public demonstrations.

Juliet Because obviously the public, school visits, educational visits, it is a big part of work here at Cressinghall. Can you tell me about the horses’ role perhaps with the public. Whether the public... Do they just see them, or do they have the opportunity to do anything with the horses?

Richard What we try and offer, or has always been my goal is that the... there’s a horse experience for everybody who comes here. So whether it is just them coming in and being up close to them in the stables, so they can access them physically and see them. It depends on the work load course, seasonality, but during the year there’s opportunity then to see the various tasks being done. I work with the Eastern Counties Heavy Horse Association as well, so we stage two days a year, where we have up to 20 odd horses working here. So the range of use goes from field work, to the whole... encompassing the whole, from ploughing, drilling, etc., through to... We are just now coming up to our summer period, so we are delivering cart rides every day, so up to three, four hours in a day, six days a week, so that’s our main sort of slog. So they are fit, they are ready to go, and they are then... as you are driving around, being drawn by horses through fields, with the historical context to then say ‘Well it is a great means to interpret the landscape’.

Juliet And you have students as well who are going to end up with qualifications at the end of their time here. Could you tell us a bit about what they could be working to, and how you see that developing perhaps?

Richard We have got HLF funding for our programme called ‘Skills for the Future’ and its acknowledge a few years ago, that we need to be training people. As I say I am 49 now, and who is going to be coming on after me? And also working in this environment, today is very different, 2013 we have got lots more things to consider. You have to be much more measured in your approach, much safer thinking. But it just makes you think well I can do the job, but do it safely. So we’ve started by having... I’ve actually had two already, and in this round of funding, and I’ve just started... six weeks ago, my last two, Dan Preston, and Daniel Chatham, and we are working with them to get up to speed, with handling the horses. Predominantly... Start with using the driving, and using the framework via the British Driving Society, which is then the acknowledged training route to any programme. And then my speciality is obviously the working side, then I can add too on that, so it will encompass driving the horses... Well grooming for me as a driver, getting them experienced, they have just done a road driving assessment to see how much training they will need. I will then get them up to driving, and they will be driving on the roads, then hopefully we will then go to the farming year, and at the end of it they will go away with... They are attending the local college as well to get an agricultural qualification. So their portfolio will be quite extensive, so hopefully in time, when I am not here, or other places that are working, they can go along, give them their file and actually say, I am not just anybody. I am here, I have got this behind me and I can deliver to this standard. And it maintains its skills, and it also keeps it alive.

Juliet And safety these days, if you are dealing with the public, it is something that needs to be taken into consideration.

Richard Its really the primary consideration, and anything you do... and obviously here I am responsible, not only for my staff, but for visitors and everybody’s well-being, so I have to assess that every day people think I am just walking around and er... but I am taking... You have got to take in all the factors before you do anything, whether it is leading the horses in, preparing them for work. What job are we going to do? What’s the temperature? All these factors. How fit the horses are? So it is applying all the knowledge and skill I’ve accumulated over the years to make sure that it looks effortless. I often say to people ‘You wouldn’t believe how hard it is to look this casual’, because that is what it is about... it is actually making sure that, to the best of your ability thought things through, and then assessing people. Obviously with training, now I can give people tasks, but I am also assessing them, saying well can they cope with that? How are they taking that knowledge in? Can they then build on that, or actually I need to go back two steps, build them up again. So I have also got a teaching qualification as well, so it is encompassing everything. So hopefully the end product, I have passed on some of what I know, and then it is down to them to do the miles, to get the experience, but hopefully they have got the building blocks to do that.

Juliet And with the horses yourself, do you take your horses out... in addition to the work you do here, do you take your horses out to do any shows, or ploughing matches and things?

Richard I am not really geared up for showing, as many people are, I don’t have vehicles and the time and all the rest... the harness etc. But what I can do, is I can go out and if there are ploughing matches, I go... Because it is my full time job, and I’ve done it for quite a while now, it is nice to be... I am not desperately competitive, but if I go out there, I want to go and win. I will do my... Well not necessarily win, but do my best to show that actually, it is keeping a skill, which is what ploughing matches are about, keeping it alive. Keeping it real, and then also applying that to... A friend of mine works for the local estate and we have been out horse logging there. I have got the National Trust are enquiring at the moment locally, they have got some wind-blown trees, difficult situations would we as a project go and look at their areas to move stuff by... using the horses to pull the timber out. Promotional stuff, because I am actually employed by Norfolk County Council, I can be asked to attend functions at County Hall, outside the Forum, or the Norfolk Show. So it is all part and parcel of what I do. But when I am there, I am obviously an ambassador for here, for the company, for Norfolk County Council, and then getting the message across that... Yes we have horses here, but it is about why we have them and their importance.

Juliet And do you think... I mean for the future of the Suffolk Punch, the future of Suffolk in-heritage work, do you foresee that building up these skill sets, with your students... do you foresee a future for the breed in work like this?

Richard I have got a team of five, their economic importance is the value of them, they are all working, they are generating my wages. They are giving people a good time. We have got income coming in, so they are relevant. So 2013 five working horses, Suffolk Punchs’ are all relevant and earning money. Now it is not just about money, it is also being here as a shop window to show people, yes the historical context, but actually what they can do. What the capabilities are, and always looking forward to think well, we are not just sat here in a museum context, what is the next thing. Like the horse logging... You know, looking at different opportunities that arise. Looking at what is the way forward? Can we use modern machines? Is there stuff coming in from America. I have got a horse drawn muck spreader that I use.. What is the economic value? And how then can we use the resources we have got to facilitate training? To make sure standards are kept? To keep skills alive? So it is always looking forward, not backwards.

Juliet I think that’s fascinating that despite having referred to the earlier enclosures map to draw your field boundaries, you are looking to the future for the horses and to the farm as well. When you are sort of looking after your horses, I mean sort of, I say tricks of the trade, but veterinary care and farriery, do you use any old horseman’s cures, or would you go for some modern veterinary medicine?

Richard Generally it is done with... we are very fortunate, we have got some very good vets locally, and the equipment they have got now is a bit mind blowing. So any issues... because the importance of actually having horses fit to go, it is straight in, get the vet and get them... I can assess, and thinking... but straightway, the first port of call is get the experts in. Good foot care is vital. No foot, no horse. As the old saying goes. We have got a really good farrier now. We have had a few over the years, Lawrence Ridgeway. Also as part of the project we help fund him become a training farrier, and funded his first year of his apprentice costs, because then it just means that we can keep those kills in shoeing heavy horses alive. And he knows, I am a very good customer, so he knows if I ring him, he will be here, shoe on, because if my horses aren’t shod and ready to go, or sound, then obviously they are not working, they are not doing their job. And my saddler as well in Shropshire. I grow the rye, he uses it to collar make, and I will send him... so the collars I have, the rye is grown here, he makes them and I am using then the product here. So it is trying to keep this small pool of artisans really, again relevant, keeping that alive and economically keeping the whole system working.

Juliet I believe in the past you have bred a foal here, but generally speaking you don’t breed, you are working your horses, which obviously that is providing a market for other people breeding them. I mean might you consider breeding in the future, or do you not feel that that’s something that is part of the scope here.

Richard It is something that is always there, and again it just depends what horses are around when I am buying. Breeding horses is a separate sort of thing in a way, you need to... If you have got a mare that’s foaled you need to house it, you have then got a young foal, you can’t work your mare. I need to have horses ready to go at all times really. So I also take the opportunity, there are people locally that breed, so during the summer months, if they have got a mare in foal the last few years, I’ve asked them. They bring their mare and foal here, so again the visitors can see, it promotes the breed again. And for the mare and the foal, most importantly, they are seeing horses going passed working, so it is a good experience for the foal too. So it is er... a lot of advantages in doing what we do, but yes, it would be fantastic to breed, but I do also feel that by buying the horses I buy that creates a market in some respect, to actually have working horses here.

Juliet It is fascinating. Perhaps before we finish, is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Suffolk horses at Cresinghall, or another aspect of the farm?

Richard Well I suppose I am very lucky, and I think every day I am very fortunate that I never look at coming here as work. This is what I do. This is what I am. To come in and think well actually I will go ploughing today, we will get them horses up... and there’s a tremendous sense... Because it is my full time job, that I can have that, just that... being at one and doing a good job, and sharing it. There is a term ‘A horseman is known as a teamsman’ and that’s what it is, it is a team effort. They rely on me, I rely on them. And when you stand back and look at a nice straight furrow, or the horse has gone well, you can’t put a price on that. So it is that whole sense of being connected, having the ability to do it, which is by years of experience, and I am very fortunate that I am able to still do it today really. And great now that I have got the opportunity to pass on some of the skills I have.

Juliet Richard thank you very much indeed for telling us about the farm here at Cressinghall and the horses.