

William Derby Chief Executive & Clerk of the Course York Racecourse

This week we were delighted to have the opportunity to put a few questions to William Derby Chief Executive and Clerk of the Course for York.



William Derby, 44, has been Chief Executive and Clerk of the Course at York Racecourse since 2003, having joined York Racecourse from Ascot Racecourse. A qualified chartered accountant with PwC, he joined Ascot Racecourse in 1997 as Head of Finance before being promoted to Commercial Director. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales, a non-executive director of Racecourse Media Group and Governor of Terrington Hall School. During his time as chief executive, York Racecourse has been voted 'Racecourse of the Year' by members of the Racegoers Club and by the Racehorse Owners Association as well as being the top northern large racecourse every year. York Racecourse is the biggest sporting venue in Yorkshire and record attendances have been set at over 360,000 racegoers in addition to some 700 non raceday events. A recently commissioned economic impact study undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University found York Racecourse brought £58m to the City's economy each year and supported 1,350 full-time jobs.

York Racecourse hosted Royal Ascot at York in June 2005 and the St Leger Festival in 2006 while Doncaster Racecourse was being redeveloped. In 2003 York opened the £20m Ebor Stand and in 2004 the north bend of the racecourse was created completing the circuit of the track for the first time. In 2007 the racecourse constitution was converted from a trust to an LLP and extended its 99 year lease with the City of York Council. In 2008/9 the racecourse completed a £2.5m track development scheme which involved a comprehensive drainage, irrigation and associated works programme – the largest of its type on a British Racecourse. In 2010 the racecourse completed a £2m project to construct a new racegoer lounge and new Owners' club room. A £10m scheme to improve the northern area of the racecourse was started in the autumn of 2013, with a new pre-parade ring and saddling boxes in use at the Dante Festival in May 2014. A new weighing room and racegoer facilities will also be built and in use for the 2015 season. 2015 sees a record investment in prize money with prize funds of over £6m. York's flagship race meeting, the Welcome to Yorkshire Ebor Festival in mid August, is one of the highlights of the British flat season. With prize money of over £3m, three Group Ones and the Ebor Handicap as the richest flat handicap in Europe, the meeting is a sporting, fashion and social highlight of the region. William lives in Gilling East with his wife, Polly, and daughters, Sophie and Serena.



Can you tell us a little about your day to day role as Chief Executive and Clerk of the Course and what they involve on a typical day.



What I love about my job is there is no such thing as a typical day! I might be walking the course, in a BHA meeting in London or visiting local trainers (and often bumping into Nick as he visits Middleham Park horses!).

The role of both Chief Executive and Clerk of the Course means I head up both the business and racing aspects of the racecourse. This works well for York and ensures that racing is at the heart of what we do and every decision we make. Reporting to a non-executive board, the York Race Committee headed by our chairman Lord Grimthorpe, a team of 100 people work all year round at the racecourse and this rises to 1,500 on a busy raceday. With 17 racedays from May to October, 330,000 racegoers a year, and over 700 non racing events (anything from conferences, to weddings, to tattoo fairs, to film shoots), we are a busy site and there is always plenty to keep me busy! Planning and preparation is a lot of what we do: whether that is achieving our aspirations in relation to prize money and developing the race programme –

we have doubled our prize money to over £6m and achieved 12 upgrades to our now 30 black type races at York over the last decade; developing the facilities – we have invested over £50m in the last twenty years in stands, the track, the stables and the wider racecourse; and improving the raceday experience – whether that is our investment in big screens or in the training and development of our raceday team.

The North End Development has been a major project at York this year, how has it gone and what has been the reaction from people who have visited and work within the new structures?



The Northern End Development has been a £10m, two year investment to reconfigure the facilities for horses, jockeys and racegoers in the area around the parade ring aimed at improving the experience for all and to help York to continue to be a leading racecourse in the world.

The key element was to relocate the pre-parade ring to give horses, connections and racegoers more space and a better re-layout. Crucial to achieving this was convincing our landlord, the City of York Council, to let us incorporate some extra land from the Knavesmire. This has allowed us to build a bigger and flatter pre-parade ring with saddling boxes, washdown and equine welfare facilities; a new, modern weighing room for jockeys; and improved facilities for owners and racegoers with the new Parade Ring Restaurant, Owners' entrance and new Moët champagne bars and lawns. We are delighted with the project. We wanted to deliver modern, high quality and first-class facilities but for these to be appropriate and in keeping with the

setting and context of York. It was a tight programme and it is never straightforward building the main structures in the winter but the design, construction and our own racecourse team work really hard to deliver the facilities to be in use for the Dante Festival, with the completion of the project set for Ebor 2015. The reaction from jockeys, owners and racegoers has been overwhelming. It transforms the layout of this area of the racecourse and improves viewing, the facilities and the landscape. One of the most pleasing things for me is the reaction of the horses – they seem so relaxed and settled in the pre-parade ring which is one of the key objectives we wanted to achieve.



Parade Ring Restaurant fine dining experience



Weighing Room & Parade Ring Restaurant

The new weighing room is an innovative facility that enables the race goers to see the jockeys as they go about their business what has been the response from the jockeys, staff and race goers?

A big part of the project was to demystify aspects of the raceday operation and allow racegoers to see more of what goes on in the weighing room, so we wanted to create a light-filled building with lots of big windows to allow viewing of the jockeys weighing in and out and going to and from the stewards' room. For the jockeys, stewards and staff working inside the weighing room, we wanted them to be able to see out and get a flavour of the raceday, so we installed "contra-vision" glass to the jockeys changing room which allows them to see out but protects the privacy and modesty of the jockeys!

We spent a lot of time with jockeys, the PJA and the BHA planning and detailing the weighing room so have been delighted to see it in use for the first time at Dante 2015 and the tremendous response. From the improved medical and physio facilities, the enhanced provision for female riders or the TVs in the saunas, it has been great for the team to receive such a positive reaction. Of course, the project still has to be completed and there are inevitable elements of snagging and tweaks to do as we get to live and work in the building but we hope it is a lasting legacy which will be there for a long time.

With such a busy role at York what do you do to relax away from the racecourse?

I am a racing, sports and horse fan so I am lucky to do a job I love and it never really feels too much like work. We live up near Helmsley and our two young girls who keep us busy with ponies, swimming and a multitude of activities! I am fortunate that my dog, Rosy, comes into the racecourse most days so I love walking the course each day as part of my job!



New weighing room



William with Rosy & the Grounds Team

Many of our owners are looking forward to the Ebor at York in August can you tell us a bit more about this year's festival.

It is the meeting we all look forward to and when our racing moves onto an international scale. The top quality racing, the fashion, the social and the buzz makes it unique to the British summer racing and our famous champagne pricing policy hopefully means racegoers can enjoy it in style!



Australia winning the Juddmonte

We have further boosted prize money to £3.7m with both increases to the feature races and so that no race is worth less than £45,000. We are thrilled and delighted that our flagship race, the £850,000 Group 1 Juddmonte International, is currently the highest rated race in the world. We are planning to formally open the northern end development with the official unveiling of the Sir Henry Cecil Gates by the new Owners' entrance and a new, adjacent equine statue. Aside from the racing there are lots of other elements to the meeting, including the Ebor Fashion Lawn, music both during and after racing, and some fabulous menus for our restaurants.

One initiative your owners may be interested in is a Skybet backed Ebor preview evening at the racecourse on the Tuesday night – last year was a great night with your trainers, David O'Meara and Richard Fahey, pointing the way to a few winners.



Racing past the Ebor & Knavesmire Stand

You are involved in the Annual Writing Awards for Young People how did you get involved with that and what are the aims of the awards?

I love reading about racing and sport and was honoured to be asked to be a judge on the Martin Wills Writing Awards, to act as a judge for the first time this year. The tremendous talent and imagination of the young writers blew me away and the panel had a hard task finding the winning stories in each category. See what you think of our choices www.willswritingawards.co.uk

Music shows have been a popular addition to racecourse events and this year York plays host to Sir Tom Jones and Scouting for Girls, how have these events been received since you started holding them and what has the impact been?

We introduced our Music Showcase Weekend as a new fixture in 2004 as a way of introducing racing to a wider audience. We started in a modest fashion with X Factor finalists and it has grown so that recent performances have included Blondie, Madness and The Kaiser Chiefs – the latter of which is the highest attended evening meeting on a British racecourse.

For us, we have always tried to ensure the racing remains the prime focus so have invested in a quality race programme of £319,000 on the Friday evening 24 July and Saturday afternoon 25 July, which includes both the Listed EBF Lyric Stakes and the Group 2 Skybet York Stakes. As well as staging great racing and musical performances, we invest in introducing and explaining racing to visitors who may be first time or irregular racegoers. Feedback and research confirms it is a great way of introducing and converting people to our sport.



Music Fesitvals at York

Since you have been at York there has been considerable investment at the racecourse, moving forward what further developments would you like to see and what challenges do you think York will face in keeping it at the forefront of British racing?

We never struggle to find things to spend money on – it is getting the revenue in that is the challenge!

We will keep investing to further improve the facilities, experience and prize money at York and aim to keep attracting the best horses and jockeys to race at York and racegoers to watch them.

One of the key challenges for the sport is to ensure the partnership and symbiotic relationship between racing and betting has an appropriate and modern framework to ensure it reflects the way people now bet in the modern world.

William

Many thanks to William from all the MPR team for giving our readers an insight into your role, life at York Racecourse and the recent North End Development. With racing today for the Mid Summer raceday and tomorrow for the Macmillan Charity raceday it's a great opportunity to visit York Racecourse and see and experience the fabulous new facilities for yourself. Gates open both days at 11.15am.

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