

SAWBRIDGEWORTH HISTORY.

SAWBRIDGEWORTH RACECOURSE.

The story of the supposed 'Horse Racecourse' at West Road.

The 'Racecourse' at Sawbridgeworth appears to have been the brainchild of Sir Edmund Broughton Barnard. At the time a well-known local personage.

Edmund was for a time MP for Kidderminster but is best remembered in Sawbridgeworth as a local politician. Edmund served on Sawbridgeworth Urban District Council, being its Chairman 1905 – 1907. He was also an original member of Hertfordshire County Council, becoming its Chairman and an Alderman in 1920.

Edmund served as a Justice of the Peace for both Essex and Hertfordshire, and was deputy Lord Lieutenant for Hertfordshire. Edmund was awarded an OBE in 1920, followed by a knighthood in 1928 'For Valuable Services to Local Government'. Edmund was also a freemason and a founding member of the Sawbridgeworth Lodge.

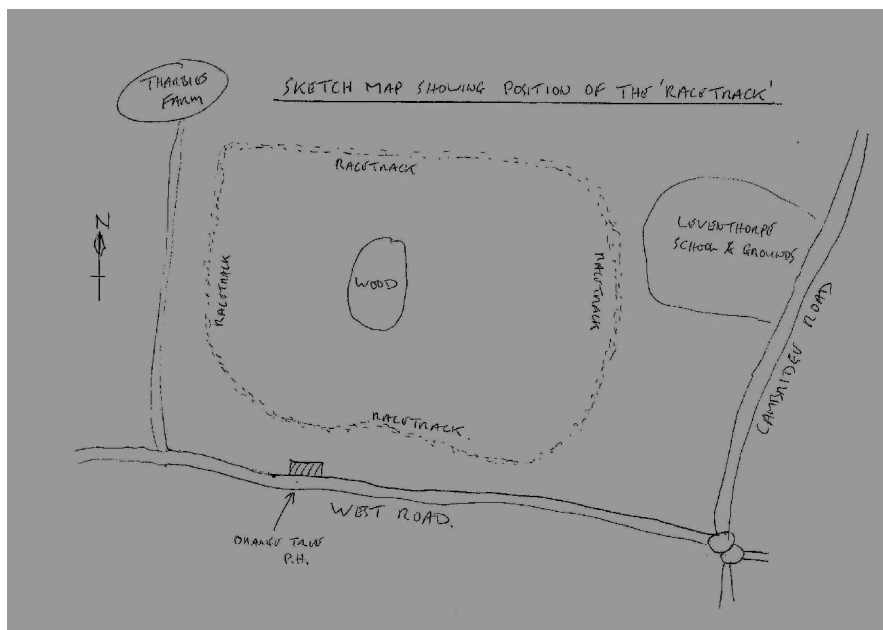
In January 1930, whilst chairing a meeting of Hertfordshire County Council (held at the Law Society's Hall in London), Sir Edmund suffered a heart attack and died almost immediately.



Sir Edmund Broughton Barnard OBE. MA. DL. JP. (1856-1930)

Edmund was born in Sawbridgeworth. He was educated firstly at Brighton College Boarding School (in Brighton, Sussex) and later attended university at Downing College, Cambridge. Edmund was an excellent horseman. Whilst at Brighton he would race under Jockey Club rules, once winning 3 times at Lewes races.

Tharbies Farm was acquired by the Barnard family in about 1846 and It was reported that at the end of the 19th century Edmund Barnard had between 100 and 150 racehorses stabled there. Presumably Edmund did not own all of them, but clearly was involved in the training of them. Accordingly, with the help of his resident tenant farmer James Kirkby who was also a follower of the National Hunt, Edmund built his own private racecourse for this. It ran from Tharbies Farm near Allen's Green, then on behind the Orange Tree public house, almost as far as the Bull public house before returning to Tharbies Farm.



A sketch map showing the approximate position of the 'Racecourse' taken from Google Earth

Eyewitness reports stated that the 'Racecourse' was roughly circular in shape with a small wood in the middle. It was 25 yards wide and ran for about a mile crossing several jumps 'over the sticks'. No stands for spectators were ever built and the 'Racecourse' was never officially sanctioned or approved by either the Jockey Club nor the National Hunt. Reportedly one reason given for this was that it was in too close proximity to Newmarket, (although this seems a little unlikely). Nonetheless, shares in the 'Racecourse' were still issued to local tradesmen as a means of funding. Unfortunately, no dividends were ever recorded and the traders were to lose their investment. Further eyewitness statements claim the 'Racecourse' was used mainly for sporting gallops and training, although some very unofficial 'Race Meetings' were apparently held.

In 1888 Edmund was involved in some illicit activity at Northampton races with a Richard Grimes which resulted in both of them being banned by the Jockey Club and the Steeplechase Society of France, from all racecourses where National Hunt rules were in force in Britain and Ireland, (and presumably France), and being warned off Newmarket Heath. It is unclear why this happened, but

a logical assumption is that it may have been something to do with the 'Racecourse' at Sawbridgeworth.

Edmund appealed this ban and was presumably successful because he remained an avid racegoer and a staunch supporter of the National Hunt for the rest of his life.

The 'Racecourse' ceased to be used as such in the mid-1920s. The last known unofficial 'Race Meeting' being held there in 1924. It was though still occasionally used for other activities. In the late 1920s/early 1930s it was used for visits by Sir Malcolm Campbell's Flying Circus. This group of 2 or 3 biplanes would offer pleasure flights to visitors. A flight over Sawbridgeworth would cost 5 shillings (25p), and a flight over Bishop's Stortford would be 7 shillings and 6d (37.5p). Later again though, in the 1930s, the land was ploughed over and returned to agricultural use.

The old track of the 'Racecourse' may still be discerned from the air using websites such as Google Earth. However, at the time of writing this article, a major housing development has been approved for the area which will likely remove most traces of it. Therefore, it is good to record this piece of largely forgotten history.

As an afterword, and absolutely nothing to do with the West Road/Tharbies Farm site, it should be perhaps be mentioned that Sawbridgeworth was once the venue for an approved horse race meeting. This took place much earlier in 1841 and is covered in my article *A Day at the Races* on the SLHS website.

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