

1800-1925

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including **The Batsons and Plenipotentiary**

Compiled by Stuart Miller 2011

Acknowledgements:

- 'Horseheath Hall and its Owners' by Catherine Parsons, 1948
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from 'Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society', Vol.XLI
1943-47
- Patricia Erigero, Thoroughbred Heritage (tbheritage.com)
- 'Our Hundred Days in Europe' by Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1887

- **Plenipotentiary**

Extract from 'Famous Horses' by *Theophilus
Taunton, 1901*

Published by Sampson Low, Marston and Co.

'The Plenipotentiary Mystery'
by Janet Morris, 2012

Extract from 'The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke
Newsletter 37' March 2012

1800 – 1925 including The Batsons and Plenipotentiary

Horseheath Lodge was built by Mr. Stanlake Batson in 1800 on the site of a former farmhouse called Owl's Hall, using bricks from Horseheath Hall for the foundations, cellars and garden walls. His father Henry Batson had bought the remains of Horseheath Hall along with the Horseheath Estate in 1783. The Batsons were keen on horse racing and had a training ground at the Lodge, called the Gallop, as well as the Limbery estate, which was converted into a stud farm. (In 1972 The Gallop was incorporated into the new point-to-point course). Batson was a long-time Jockey Club member and he bred and trained a number of race horses including the filly *Pranks* (1809), who won the Ascot Gold Cup; *Lucetta*, who was sold for 1800 sovereigns in 1829; and a horse called *Plenipotentiary*.

Patricia Erigero, Thoroughbred Heritage (tbheritage.com) writes, "The 'great fat bullock' *Plenipotentiary*, born in 1831, was a favourite of the public and admired for his heavy beauty and running ability. "*Plenipo*" grew to over 15.2 hands, with 'bone and size enough to go between the shafts of a cabriolet', and was always in good flesh, even when racing. He had a strong, easy action and excellent wind, and proved to have both stamina and speed. He was a difficult horse to manage on race days, kicking and plunging when it came time to saddle him, but otherwise was said to have a good temperament.



Plenipotentiary with his trainer Mr. Payne and jockey Patrick Connelly by Abraham Cooper

Plenipo did not start until the age of three, when he won a sweep at Newmarket Craven, beating three other youngsters. He ran again at the same meeting in a sweep, beating *Glencoe*, who was until that race, believed to be the fastest horse of his day. In this race, *Glencoe's* jockey,

Jem Robinson, had been told to beat *Plenipo* with *Glencoe's* speed, and Robinson later said, "I came the first half mile as hard as I could lick; but, on looking round, I saw the great fat bullock cantering by my side." Patrick Conolly, *Plenipo's* jockey, called over, "I'm here, Master Jemmy, only waiting until I'm wanted." And *Plenipo* proceeded to run down the used-up *Glencoe*, winning by four lengths. His next race was the Derby at Epsom, where he was 9 to 4 favourite in a field of 22. In the race he broke first, then laid back while *Glencoe* sped ahead to lead the field, and then slowly gained to pick off all the horses, and easily held off a late challenge by *Shillelegh* to win by two lengths. He went on to Ascot to take a walk-over for the St. James' Palace Stakes, worth £850.

His last race at age three was the Doncaster St. Leger, where he could barely be roused to get up in his stall before the race, stood quietly while being saddled, and tripped several times on the way to the course, Conolly remarking to trainer John Scott that *Plenipo* was "dead as a stone." He was never in the race, which was won by Touchstone, and it was evident he had been gotten at, although it was some time before it was positively confirmed - Scott's head stable lad, one Harry Mynott, confessing later (on his deathbed) to handing over the keys to *Plenipo's* box at Doncaster to an unnamed person. Several turf writers later noted that after this race, *Plenipo's* constitution was "utterly ruined." He did, however, go on to win the Craven Stakes at Newmarket in the spring of 1835, and at the same meeting won a 50 sovereign subscription plate, and took a walk-over for the Post Stakes, his last appearance on the turf.

Plenipotentiary retired to ringing accolade: "Here stands the crack of his day, as well as every other - a horse such as we ne'er shall look upon the like again, the wonderful, the unequalled *Plenipo*."

Batson turned down an offer for him from an American Commodore Robert Stockton, of either £5,000, or £1,000 a year for as long as the horse lived, a refusal Batson must have regretted later, because *Plenipotentiary* was a sore disappointment in the stud, and ended his days servicing half-bred mares for 'a fiver'." It is said that *Plenipotentiary* is buried behind the Batson Arms in Horseheath.

The American writer and poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "The Derby day of 1834 was exceedingly windy and dusty. Our party, riding on the outside of the coach, was half smothered with the dust, and arrived in a very deteriorated condition, but recompensed for it by the extraordinary sights we had witnessed. There was no train in those days, and the whole road between London and Epsom was choked with vehicles of all kinds, from four-in-hands to donkey-carts and wheelbarrows. My friends and I mingled freely in the crowds, and saw all the "humours" of the occasion. The thimble-riggers were out in great force, with their light, movable tables, the cups or thimbles, and the "little jokers," and the coachman, the sham gentleman, the country greenhorn, all properly got up and gathered about the table. I think we had "Aunt Sally," too, the figure with a pipe in her mouth, which one might shy a stick at for a penny or two and win something, I forget what.

It was no common race that I went to see in 1834. It is asserted in the columns of a contemporary that *Plenipotentiary* was absolutely the best horse of the century." This was the winner of the race I saw so long ago. Herring's coloured portrait, which I have always kept, shows him as a great, powerful chestnut horse, well deserving the name of "bullock," which one of the jockeys applied to him. "

Mr. Batson had told his tenants that if he won the Derby they would have a rent-free year for their farms, which then covered about 10,000 acres, mostly the original Horseheath Park land. Mr. Batson made a lot of money as a result of the win and added another storey to the Lodge. Three generations of Batsons owned the Lodge including a second Stanlake who was a J.P. and High Sheriff of the County. The fourth generation, also Stanlake, ran into money difficulties before he came to the age of inheritance, so the Lodge passed into the hands of mortgagees in the 1880's and was tenanted until 1925. *In 1875 the tenant was George William Drenis.*

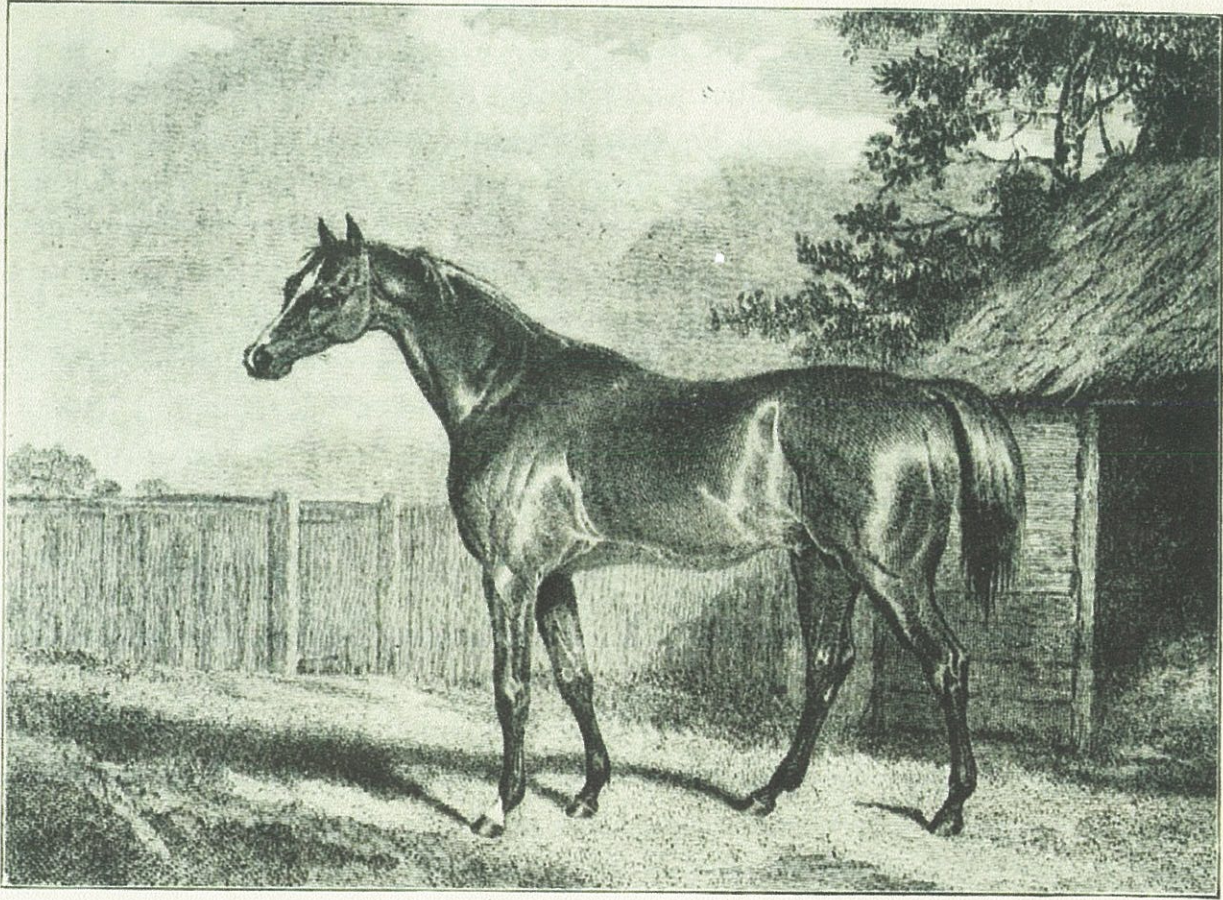
Mother

One of the tenants was Colonel George Filmer Sullivan of the 2nd Dragoons Scots Guards. He was 2nd in command in the Crimea and was present at the battles of Balacava, Inkermann and the fall of Sebastopol. He was promoted to Lieut. Colonel with three clasps and received the Legion of Honour and the Turkish Medal. Colonel Sullivan rented Horseheath Lodge, then moved to Shudy Camps Park, and finally to Bartlow House.

Stuart Miller, 2011

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- 'Horseheath Hall and its Owners' by Catherine Parsons, 1920
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Painted by Abraham Cooper, R.A.

PLENIPOTENTIARY.

PLENIPOTENTIARY, a rich chestnut son of Emilius,—Harriet by Pericles,—a dau. of Selim,—Pipylina (sister to Pipylin) by Sir Peter,—Rally by Trumpator, was bred by Mr. S. Batson in 1831. Plenipotentiary stood just fifteen hands two and a half inches high, and was a horse of such ponderous muscle, and carried so much flesh, that he always looked like a fat bullock when in training; but no horse was ever so much admired for his beauty and racing points. Principal Performances. 1834. Newmarket Craven, R.M.: Beat Glencoe (who two days before had won the Riddlesworth in a canter). Robinson, whose orders were to try and cut down Plenipo by the severity of the pace, remarked after the race: "I came the first half mile as hard as I could lick; but, on looking round, I saw the great fat bullock cantering by my side, Conolly at the same time exclaiming, 'I'm here, Master Jemmy, only waiting till I'm wanted.'" Glencoe, believed till then to be the fastest horse of his day, was beaten four lengths. Epsom: Won the Derby. At the distance Plenipotentiary collared Glencoe, and very soon had him beaten. Conolly then looked round for Shillelah, and, seeing that Chifney was bringing him up, he gave Plenipo his head; and, without

the shadow of a struggle, won by two lengths, Glencoe beaten half a length from the second, Doncaster: Not placed for the St. Leger, won by Touchstone. Plenipo was dead beaten early in the race; and, the further he went, the further he was left behind. Foul play had most effectually done its work; and he was not only made safe for the day, but his constitution was utterly ruined. Plenipo was a very difficult horse to saddle, and still more so to mount, rearing, plunging, and kicking, and using every effort to prevent Conolly getting into the saddle; but, on the St. Leger day, he made not the slightest show of resistance. Indeed, Conolly, after an attempt at a preliminary canter, observed to John Scott, "my horse is as dead as a stone." 1835. Newmarket: Won the Craven Stakes, the field including Nonsense, Glaucus, and Shillelah.

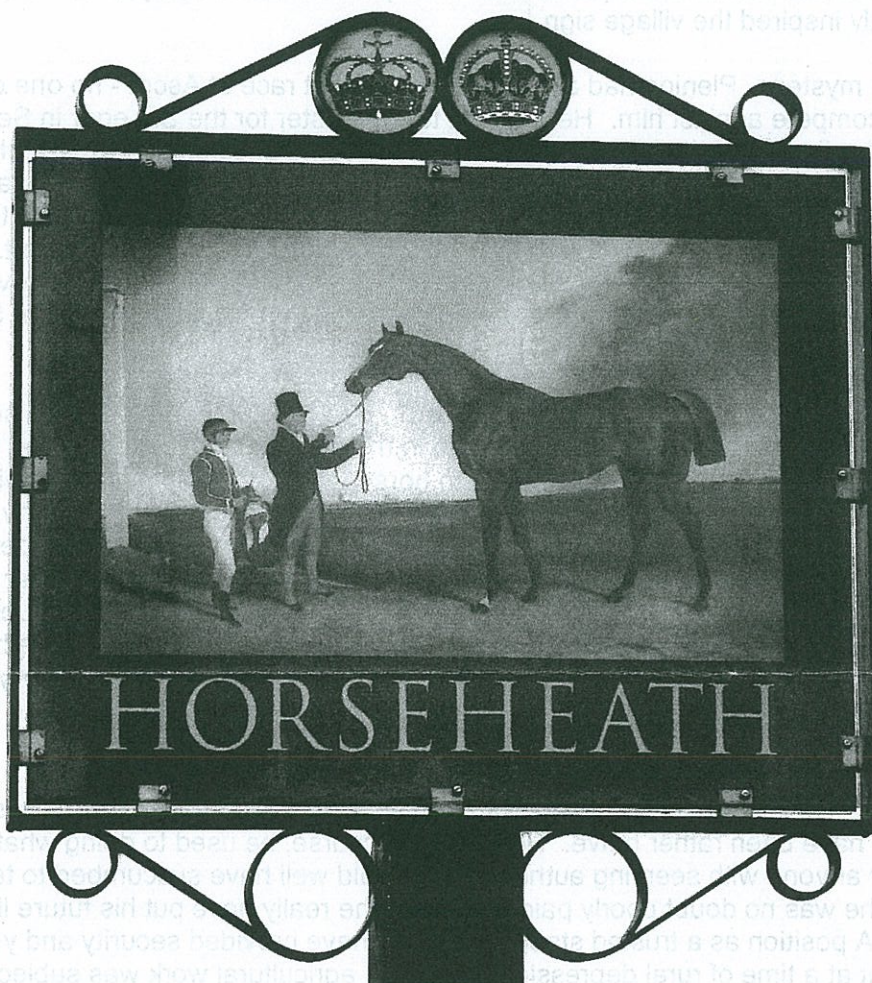
PUSSY, a very dark brown dau. of Pollio (by Orville,—Blue Stockings by Popinjay (son of Buzzard,—a dau. of Bondrow (by Eclipse,—a dau. of Sweeper (by Sloe),—Escape's dam by Squirrel), Valve by Bob Booty (son of Chanticleer (by Woodpecker),—Ierne by Bagot),—Wire (sister to Whalebone), by Waxy, was foaled in 1831. Principal Performances. 1834. Epsom: Won the Oaks. It was not until they had passed Tattenham Corner that the pace was increased by Louisa forcing it into something like racing. May Day lay on the higher ground, Frank Boyce sitting quite still upon her, and having more the appearance of winning than anything in the race. Here Cotillon made an effort, but Scott saw it was a vain attempt, and in a few strides she was among the hindmost. In this order they crossed the gravel road, and were approaching the distance, when May Day was seen to pitch forwards, falling with a fearful crash, and throwing Boyce over her head, but he was on his legs in an instant. Old John now brought Pussy to the fore, who up to that point had never appeared to be in the race; and, so full of running was she, that it was quite evident the race was at her disposal, and she finally won by a length and a half. Ascot: Won the Ascot Derby.

MAY DAY, a chestnut dau. of Lamplighter (by Merlin,—Spotless by Walton,—a dau. of Trumpator,—a dau. of Highflyer,—Otheothea),—a dau. of Rubens,—Tippitywitchett by Waxy, was bred by Lord Berners in 1831. This Rubens Mare (the dam of May Day) was dam also of Recovery, Camarine, Juniper, and Phosphorus. May Day won the One Thousand Guineas of 1834, Velocity being second; but, unfortunately, broke her leg while running well for the Oaks and was shot.



Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

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THE PLENIPOTENTIARY MYSTERY

When you pass through Horseheath on your way to or from a walk along the Roman Road, you might be forgiven for thinking that the rather handsome village sign, which pictures a race horse, was just a nice play on the name of the village but this was a real horse and famous resident - Plenipotentiary, the winner of the 1834 Derby – and one with some drama, if not a bit of a mystery, attached to him.

Plenipotentiary was owned and bred by the wonderfully named Stanlake Batson (1773-1857) who lived at Horseheath Lodge. Stanlake inherited the Horseheath Hall estate from his father but as the Hall itself had been demolished and sold off for building materials in the 1790s, he built himself a new modern house, the Lodge, on the opposite side of the village between the Roman Road at Mark's Grave and what is now the A1307 (recently the home of the late Sir Arthur Marshall). Stanlake was a keen 'man of the turf' and a prominent member of the Jockey Club. He established a stud farm and set up a training ground on his Horseheath estate, part of which was apparently incorporated into the present-day point-to-point course when it was set out in the 1970s.

Plenipo (his conveniently shortened name) was born in Horseheath in 1831. He was a powerful, chestnut coloured horse, described at the time as a 'great fat bullock' but much admired for his speed and stamina. After a couple of wins at Newmarket, he was justifiably the favourite when entered for the Derby at Epsom in 1834, which he went on to win by an astonishing two lengths. There must have been celebrations back in Horseheath as Stanlake had promised his tenant farmers a rent-free year if the horse won and Plenipo's seventeen-year-old Horseheath stable lad, Henry (known as Harry) Mynott, became something of a village celebrity. Stanlake was able to enlarge the Lodge with the money the win brought him. He added a second storey (removed by a subsequent owner) and he commissioned Abraham Cooper to paint Plenipo with trainer and jockey – a painting that has subsequently inspired the village sign ¹.

Now for the mystery. Plenipo had a walkover in his next race at Ascot - no one even wanted to enter a horse to compete against him. He went on to Doncaster for the St Leger in September where he was again the firm favourite. However, this time he came absolutely nowhere. He was not even placed in the race. So what had gone wrong? Was he simply unprepared or was it poor training? These are certainly possibilities. Before the advent of the railways, horses had to walk from racecourse to racecourse even though they may be a hundred or so miles apart. This could take two or three weeks. So, perhaps not enough time had been allowed for him to recover and he was just not racing fit. However, there seems to be no evidence that would indicate that Stanlake ever had any doubts about the ability, or indeed integrity, of trainer or jockey.

Was there something more underhand going on? Had Plenipo been 'got at' in some way before the race? Not an unnatural conclusion to come to in the circumstances, nor indeed for the time. There is no doubt that there was big money at stake in horse racing, then as now, and this would have given plenty of motive for someone to disable Plenipo. 'Nobbling' was apparently fairly commonplace in the racing industry. The horse was said to have been difficult to rouse in his stall before the race and be unusually docile while being saddled, although this is the sort of thing his trainer and jockey might well have said in order to shift the blame if their own competence was being questioned. One suspect would be the stable lad, Harry Mynott, but no suspicion seems to have been attached to him at the time. It is only much later that there has been some suggestion that Harry made a deathbed confession that he had handed over the keys of Plenipo's stall on the eve of the race to some unnamed person ².

So, could Plenipo have been 'nobbled' with the help of his stable lad? Harry was very young and may simply have been rather naïve. He would, of course, be used to doing what he was told without question by anyone with seeming authority. He could well have succumbed to temptation if offered money, as he was no doubt poorly paid, but would he really have put his future livelihood in jeopardy? A position as a trusted stable lad would have provided security and year round employment at a time of rural depression and when agricultural work was subject to seasonal vagaries. Harry certainly does not seem to have profited if his subsequent history is anything to go by. At his marriage in 1845 he was described as a labourer (he signed the register with a mark). In every Horseheath census from 1851 to 1881 his occupation was given as Groom and in 1891 he and his wife, Susan, were recorded as receiving parish poor relief. Jonas Marshall Webb recalled Harry in a memoir published in 1928. Harry had been groom to his uncle, John Webb, of Church Farm in Horseheath and had one hand that was helpless from the wrist where he had been 'disabled by a savage racehorse' ³. An elderly Harry can indeed be seen holding this arm rather awkwardly in a photograph included in *Horseheath: Some recollections of a Cambridgeshire Parish* by Catherine Parsons ⁴. Both she and J M Webb knew Harry well and wrote about him long after his death in 1898. Neither, perhaps tellingly, made any mention of any supposed 'deathbed confession'.

Whatever the reason for Plenipo's failure in Doncaster, it seems to have had a permanent effect on his reputation. Accounts say the horse was never the same again, that his racing days were well and truly over and that he was not even a success at stud. This is not entirely true - Plenipo did go on to win some lesser events and some of his progeny were successful, if not spectacularly so – but he may well have ended his days 'servicing half-bred mares for a fiver' before his death in 1854 ⁵. It all seems a rather inglorious finish to the career of a racehorse that had until then been called 'the best horse of the century'!

1. Information on the Batson family and Plenipotentiary can be found in Catherine Parsons 'Horseheath Hall and its owners' *Proceedings of Cambridge Antiquarian Society* Vol XLI 1948
2. Information about Harry Mynott's 'deathbed confession' and other details about Plenipo can be found on Patricia Erigero's Thoroughbred Heritage website (www.tbheritage.com)
3. Jonas Marshall Webb *Streetly: A Tale of Cambridgeshire by a Native* 1928 (a copy is in the Cambridgeshire Collection)
4. Catherine Parsons *Horseheath: Some recollections of a Cambridgeshire Parish* 1952 (typescript in Cambridgeshire Archives P95/28/16)
5. See note ii