

Great Barton's connection to the Epsom Derby

Prior to 1789 all English horse racing was 2 miles and over and for horses of 4 years and older. At the "The Oaks" country house, just outside Epsom, leased by [Edward Smith-Stanley, 12th Earl of Derby](#), in May 1778 a new race was conceived, a flat horse race (a horse race without jumps) over 1 straight mile for 3 year old fillies. On 14th May 1779 [The Oaks Stakes](#) was first run, named after Lord Derby's leased house. This race was won by *Bridget* Lord Derby's horse.



In 1779 the 12th Earl of Derby and [Sir Charles Bunbury](#) wanted a race which would include 3 year old colts as well as 3 year fillies run over the same course as the *Oaks Stakes*. It was decided to toss a coin to see who the race would be named after. Since Earl Derby won the toss the race was named the [Epsom Derby Stakes](#), if Sir Charles Bunbury had won it would have been named Epsom Bunbury Stakes!

The Epsom Derby Stakes was first run on 4th May 1780 and was won by Sir Charles Bunbury's horse [Diomed](#) ridden by Sam Arnall. The prize money was £1,065 15s so there was some consolation. The original straight 1 mile race course was changed in 1784 to its present location to include Tattenham Corner, the race distance increasing to 1 mile and 4 furlongs (2,414 metres). As a result of an official measurement in 1991 the official distance was increased by another 10 yards!

Sir Thomas Charles Bunbury 6th Baronet who went by his middle name, Sir Charles Bunbury, was born in May 1740. He was married to Sarah Lennox 2nd June 1762. The marriage was dissolved 14th May 1776 by Act of Parliament. He married again and died aged 81 in 1821. He was President of [The Jockey Club](#), founded in 1750. He was Member of Parliament for Suffolk 1761- 1784 and again 1790 - 1812. Between 1788 -1789 he was the Sheriff of Suffolk. His country estate was Barton Hall, which was in the middle of the village, was destroyed by fire in 1914.

Sir Charles Bunbury brought the winner of the original Epsom Derby Stakes the bright chestnut horse Diomed "the marvel" from the horse breeder the Honorable Richard Vernon of Newmarket. Diomed started 19 times, winning 11, placed in 4, and showing in 3. He was considered by many to be the best colt seen in Britain since the great English Thoroughbred [Eclipse](#). Failing to win in the last 6 races he was put out to stud for an initial fee of 5 guineas his fee was increased to 10 guineas in 1789. Interest in Diomed as a sire waned and the 21 year old stallion was bought in 1798 by partners Mr. Lamb and Mr. Younger for 50 guineas. They sold him to Hoomes and Tayloe for about 1000 guineas who took him back to America. They sold him to Colonel Selden for a fee reputed to be 6 times their original investment. He died in 1808 aged 31.

The Oak Stakes and the Epsom Derby Stakes form two of the five English Classic Flat horse racing season still run today at Epsom. The others are the 2000 guineas and the 1000 guineas run at Newmarket, and the St. Leger run at Doncaster.

Race horse breeding still takes place in Great Barton at [Barton Stud](#). Diomed, the first horse to win the Epsom Derby Stakes, is remembered by *Diomed Drive* the spine road which runs round Hall Park.



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