

The Braes, back to former glories

High standards in an open, grass country which is united and happy



Mrs Peggy Bulliam (left) and Mr and Mrs John Darling.

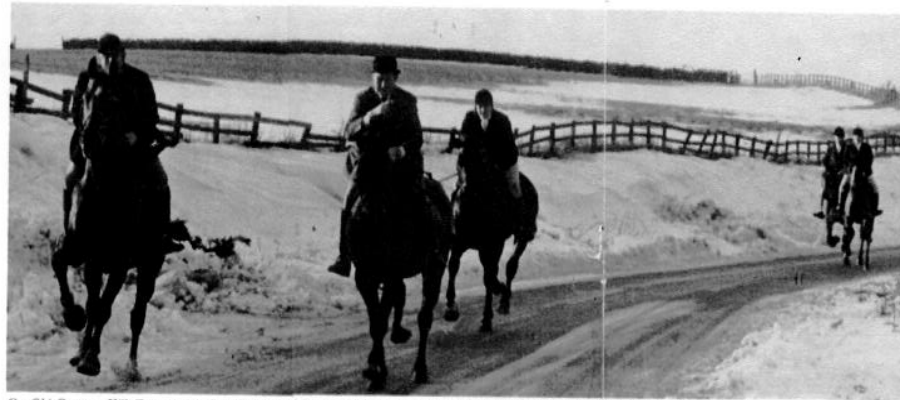
The country was first hunted by a Mr Humble with a trencher-fed pack in the middle of the eighteenth century. The present Braes of Derwent country, which lies in Co Durham and Northumberland, dates from 1854 when Colonel W Cowen took the hounds. He remained as Master until 1872. It was then that his nephew Mr J A Cowen took it on until 1896.

Mr L Priestman then became Master, with his nephew Major Jack Priestman hunting hounds for much of the time, finally giving up his Mastership in 1945. Then Mr G A Cowen took on hunting the hounds and remained as Master or Joint Master with Mr J S Beatham until 1968. Thus in more than a century only two families guided the fortunes of the hunt.

A fine tough pack of hounds was bred during this time. They were of the old English type and they were well known for their prowess in the hunting field and on the flags at Peterborough.

On giving up the Mastership Mr Tony Cowen became Chairman, a position he held until his sudden death during June, 1976. A much loved and respected man, he will be much missed in the country.

A series of short Masterships has culminated with Mr Charles Stirling and Mr Ian Walters who is a local businessman taking



On Old Cornsey Hill Top are Mr Les Bestwick (left), Mr Willie Darling, who rode the champion hunter at Dublin this year, and Miss Angela Simpson.

over the reins in 1974. The country was divided and the hounds were in a moderate state, but by dint of hard work and enthusiasm things have been put right; good sport has been shown and the country is once again united and happy.

Many of the Braes of Derwent's famous lines have been retained and Mr Stirling set about breeding a pack of hounds on more modern lines which would be worthy of the country. It only takes a season to ruin a pack of hounds and many years to create one, but they are well on the way back to their former glories.

The Braes country is a contrasting one, set in a coal mining area with Consett Steel Works a dominant feature of the landscape. Nevertheless it is an open all-grass country.

The management have recently made great efforts to improve it.

Recently the kennels were moved from Shortley Bridge where they had been for

many years. They were in a built up area and were far too big for this day and age. Due to opencast coal mining, farm buildings became available at Whittonstall and were converted by the late Mr Tony Cowen into three small compact kennels and stables with three modern cottages. This is a move which will prove to be both far-sighted and economical. There was still a lot of snow and ice about for the meet on 8 December at Lord Butz's crossroads. The countryside looked beautiful, the snow and ice glistening in the sunshine, but it did not look a suitable day to go hunting. Mr Douglas Nicholson who has owned so many good horses mounted me on one who knew its way round the Melton cross country course, so I was well able to cope with the Braes country.

Finding in Bussfield Quarry where I was most impressed with the hounds' steadiness to deer, they ran out below Beyerley House down the Quick Burn to turn up over

Hythe Farm. Here there was a marvellous view of the fox coming up in front of hounds to cross the Steeley Burn where they checked and ran on more slowly up Black Banks to cross the Satley road by Hall Hill, and down by the Gladder to Old Cornsey. A little more luck for the huntsman would have had the fox caught, but he just beat them and ran on along the top of Ragpath-side where it was particularly interesting to jump the walls, led by the gallant Mr Walters into and out of snowdrifts. However fortune favours the brave.

The pack ran on fast and dropped down off the hill to Robinson's Wood and across the Browney River, to mark to ground in the old pit workings at Throste Nest. This had been an interesting hunt of 65 minutes and included a five-mile point.

The middle part of the day was inconclusive, but by 3.30 it was bitterly cold. They found in the Majors Whin, a lovely gorge



Mr I B Waters (centre), the Joint-Master who is to continue as sole Master next season and Mr N C Stirling, Joint-Master and Huntsman. (Behind) is T Potts, kennel-huntsman.

covert, and fairly flew through Sawmill Wood behind Red House with the wood echoing to their cry to cross the road and drop down over Dykes Wook to Knitsley, with the enormous Consett Steel Works furnaces lighting up the dusk.

The fox turned back from the Ghill back over Dykes Wook to Woodlands Park Farm to mark to ground in the strips at Woodlands Hall in the dark. This had been a circular hunt of 45 minutes on the best scent of the day.

The Joint Masters had produced a good day's hunting on a day where the conditions were against it, proving that keenness and skill can overcome difficulties. This is providing one's nerve is good enough which mine most certainly is not. However the hilly nature of the country enabled me to see more of what went on by standing on top of a hill for much of the day.

Mr Charles Stirling is a young man with

a great future. He hunted the Eton beagles and then held a commission in the 16th/15th Lancers before leaving to be qualified as an accountant which he combined with hunting the Taw Valley beagles in Devon. It is a difficult country to catch foxes in, but last season 24 brace were caught which was a postwar record. He has put the country back on its feet, but moves next season to be Master and Huntsman of the Cattistock. Certainly the Braes' loss will be the Cattistock's gain.

His Joint Master Mr Ian Walters continues in sole command. He has already proved himself a good Field Master. His heart is in the right place and what is most important is his determination to run a good show and to get back to the tradition of long Masterships. This country needs to turn away from their recent spate of short Masterships. I feel sure he will succeed.

DERMOT KELLY



Miss Young (left), Mr Joe Robson, Miss Isabel Wallis and Mrs N C Stirling, wife of the Joint-Master. He is to move next season to become Master and Huntsman of the Cattistock.



At the Meet: Miss Ella Smith (left), a lifelong supporter of the Braes, talks to Mrs Douglas Nicholson, whose husband supplied a horse for the author.



Mr Joe Robson (far left), Sir Robin Furness Bart, Mr Mark Nicholson, Mrs David Aldridge are followed by Lady Furness. This is mainly a wall country with much grass.



Mrs S B Vickers (left), the Hunt Secretary since 1963, moves on from the Meet with Mrs David Aldridge. They are followed by Mr Mark Nicholson. The photographs are by Michelle M.