

# BOSWELL'S

Surrey Union Hunt Newsletter, December 2016



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*"Going strong since 1798"*

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## A new name

The more observant of you may well have noticed that the title on the front cover of this issue is somewhat different from the last. In the last issue of this newsletter, we asked for suggestions for our (as yet) nameless publication. (Of course, this request also came with the promise of a bottle of port to the winner.)

We had plenty of fantastic ideas, but the prize must go to Katharine Meller, who pointed out that the Surrey Union used to have a newsletter, named 'Farmer Boswell's Journal',



started by Mrs Goodchild (the first person to use Boswell's as a title for the newsletter), and which Mrs Meller also used to edit.

Why Boswell's? Well, the 'official' address of the SU Hunt kennels is of course Boswell's Farm, as it has been since Victorian times. Although the various buildings on the plot have changed over the years, Boswell's is still its official name.

We decided that 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' was a jolly good motto to live by – so Boswells it is, and a bottle of port for Mrs Meller.

## *Surrey Union Hunt Boxing Day Meet* *Monday 26<sup>th</sup> December 2016*



at The SUH Kennels

Ruckmans Lane, Okewood Hill, RH5 5NE

Fully Licenced Bar & Hot Food from 11am



*Hounds & Mounted Field Meet at 12 noon*

PLEASE NOTE:

*Everyone is politely reminded to make a donation towards the Hunt Staff Boxing Day Collection  
Mounted Caps are FULL £80 / UNDER 25 £40 / UNDER 21 £25 All Enquiries: [suinfo@gmail.com](mailto:suinfo@gmail.com)*

# Surrey Union Newsletter, December 2016

## Opening Meet

As always, Opening Meet was a fantastic day in the Surrey Union calendar. Les and Nadia Edgar very kindly hosted us all at Gosterwood Manor once again, and the meet was a stonking success with hundreds of foot followers and delicious sustenance for all!

As Harry writes on the next page, Opening Meet is always an exciting day, and thanks to the masters and landowners the field certainly seemed to enjoy themselves. Helen Witchell bravely stepped in to be jumping fieldmaster for the day after her sister, Nici Wilson, had to have her shoulder reconstructed after tearing her AC ligament. (You'll all be glad to hear that she has now been given the all clear by the doctors and is now allowed to ride again).

With a mounted field of over eighty and plenty of country to cover, it wasn't necessarily an easy ask, especially for a first-timer. But she managed it with aplomb – and did such a good job that Horse & Hound

chose to use one of George Gunn's pictures of Helen jumping her horse Addy over the Kennels hedge in their choice of photographs from Opening Meets across the country. 'It was my first time field mastering,' she said of the day, 'and I had the best day – I loved every minute!'

Over the festive period we have plenty of other exciting days to look forward to – the Children's Meet at midday on Christmas Eve (children only please, unless a lead rein is needed) at Radnor Farm, and of course Boxing Day, which this year will be at The Kennels. The Surrey Union will be serving hot food and have a fully licensed bar from 11am onwards – so please spread the word far and wide!



# Surrey Union Newsletter, December 2016

## From the kennels

Autumn hunting started off hot and dry, and that never really improved. I was very pleased with hounds during this difficult scenting time and the puppies have all entered well. We had some extremely nice busy mornings and a number of lovely evenings autumn hunting, and it has been great to see so many people out enjoying the hounds in the early mornings.

Since Opening Meet – which is always an exciting day – we have enjoyed some good hunting with hounds working well in difficult scenting

***“It has been great to see so many people out enjoying the hounds in the early mornings”***

conditions. Hopefully this will continue over Christmas and into the New Year and fingers crossed that we see scent improve along the way.

Most of next year’s entry are back from their puppy walkers with two couples of exceptions! Some of them are already walking out with the older hounds but the others will be gradually introduced to walking out with the rest of the pack over Christmas.

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year.  
- **Harry Beeby**

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## Meet the Surrey Union – Our trail layer

*With the law as it currently stands, our trail layers are one of the most important aspects of a day's hunting. But how much do most of us know about what they actually get up to? We spoke to one of the Surrey Union's top trail layers to find out.*

### **What made you want to start trail laying and how did you get involved?**

The dates are etched into my memory for eternity – 18 November 2004 and 18 February 2005 – the date Parliament passed The Hunting Act, and the date when the Hunting Act 2004 came into force. As a joint master at the time, the thought of hunting becoming confined to the history books was a nightmare that only an ill-informed bureaucrat could dream up, but a distinct possibility.

In order for the Surrey Union Hunt to survive, trail hunting would have to become the modern manifestation of the sport. At first it seemed it would be impossible to retrain thousands of Fox Hounds across the country, but with some 'scientific' experimentation, we soon found that it was not necessary to retrain – but enough to simply offer a similar alternative.

After many efforts to create the most natural way of providing 'the thrill of the chase', we settled on a fox based scent that could be sprayed onto a lightweight piece of cloth and trailed from a horse, quad bike or runner. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. Having tried every way laying a trail, in my opinion, the simple running method is the best thanks to its ability to almost perfectly simulate the path of a fox across the hunt country terrain. But back to the initial question...

As one of the joint masters of the hunt, it was a worry that if an unfortunate situation should arise and the legislation of the Hunting Act was broken in some way, then to put the blame onto anyone other than those who are ultimately responsible for a day of hunting – that is, the Masters – would be unreasonable. So I took it upon myself to become the designated trail layer between 2004 and



2008. In doing so I created what could only be described as a 'foxy monster' that began to think like a fox at all times – wondering where a fox might rest up, or travel the countryside when undisturbed – and to make decisions when put under the pressure of a pack of hounds in hot pursuit. It also became a competition between myself and the huntsman about which of us could be the most cunning.

### **What does an average day out involve?**

I like to think that there is no average day when hunting. Each day has its own unwritten script. Yes, the Master of the

day plans what farmland and estates are opened, but that is as far as the plan goes. From then on it is up to the trail layer, the spirit of the hounds, the terrain and the weather.

There are many ways in which a day can be altered by the lay of the trail. The method most people expect is to give the layer a head start and then hunt after them, but more often than not the trail runs backwards towards the hounds, or is laid in advance so that the trail layer is not seen by the field.

With an explanation to the weather and how this might affect a day's hunting it is best to think of the scent as being like a cloud of smoke. The wind, temperature, humidity, and even rain can all alter its molecular action and movement. If the morning is cold but the sun raises the temperature a few degrees, the heat in the ground raises the cloud of scent higher and out of the reach of the sensitive noses of the hounds. On the other hand if it's raining heavily, the scent cloud can be diluted and distributed onto the surrounding foliage which means that the scent clings close to ground level, or can be washed away entirely.

To be totally honest, it is nigh-on impossible to rely on our own senses to check if the scent is correct. It is important that the amount of scent used is altered to make the best of the situation, but even though every eventuality might have been covered, there is nothing that can be done about a 'bad scenting day', and this makes it all the more natural for the dedicated hunt follower.

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## Meet the Surrey Union – Our trail layer

### How does being a trail layer compare to a day riding to hounds?

There truly is no comparison. The bond between a rider and their trusty steed can in no way be compared to spending the day criss-crossing the countryside trying to outfox fifteen and a half couple of fox hounds. It's not only that four legs are more effective than two when it comes to covering the ground. But I'm also sure I'm not on my own in thinking that if a time machine were to be invented, I would love to head back into the history books of true hunting in its heyday.

However this isn't the case and therefore some of the best hunting days have to be re-created for the modern era. One of the simple tasks, yet not always the easiest to achieve, is to create an experience that is hard to distinguish from traditional fox hunting. Imagination is a trail layer's strongest weapon in this case.

### What are the worst things about trail laying?

At the top of the list would be the smell of the substance that the hounds crave so much – the scent. It is not your typical Chanel No.5, although I suppose it must be for a fox! In reality there are many perils for a trail layer. In no particular order they are: brambles, mud, hills (up, not down), electric fences, large livestock (bulls), small livestock (rams), deep rivers (which didn't look that deep), more brambles and last but not least, the lack of recognition from the hunt saboteurs. They take photos and video of the mounted field, but strangely they never take any of the trail layers. Very cut-throat for the trail layer's ego, that one!

### What are the best things about laying the trail?

I know I make it sound terrible, but truthfully it is a lot of fun. With a competitive spirit it can very easily be turned into a challenge to not get caught. Yes, many miles get covered during a day, and sometimes with great peril. But on foot the essence of becoming a fox for the day, ducking and diving through bushes and hedgerows, over ditches and occasionally through rivers, does become the highlight of a trail layer's day.

There are real moments when hounds are hot on the trail where it is necessary for quick wits and a better knowledge

of the surroundings than the hounds, which can elevate the adrenaline level and provide a spurt of pace and a jink or two to throw them off the scent. When trail layer and field do finally meet up, either during the day or at the close, the real gratification comes from listening to the conversations between the riders about 'how they flew that last hedge' or that 'it was like the good old days, you know, before the ban'. For me, that's job done!

### What advice would you give to anyone willing to give it a shot?

I guess that one of the most important things is having the ability to run for an unspecified amount of time and distance. However, this shouldn't put anyone off having a go because trails can also be partially laid from a horse. There are several important notes that a budding trail layer should take. Study local maps in order to know the lay of the land and what hunt country has been opened by the Master. Dress appropriately for the conditions (this usually involves dealing with brambles, so lycra isn't always the best option). A pair of wax gaiters help no end. Carry the correct tools to do the job: trail and scent, liquid refreshment (not to be mixed up with the scent), penknife, string, GPS tracker (a smartphone is ideal) and finally a camera to document the trails with periodic commentary (supplied by the Master of the day). The one most important thing to have in abundance, however, is enthusiasm.

### How far do you end up travelling on average during a hunting day? and are there any memorable statistics?

Typical hunting days vary due to the amount of hunt country available to the Master from the farmers and landowners. Generally, distances range from 15 to 35km. Over the years there have been some memorable moments when hounds are hunting hard and cover a decent distance, usually from one farm estate to another. These are the statistics that I thrive on as they are a perfect yard stick of how authentically the job has been done.

No doubt in the future trail layers will evolve their methods, constantly improving and providing the sport that continues to thrill and deceive. That is, only until the Hunting Act 2004 is repealed. Until then keep hunting, keep fighting for repeal, keep the tradition and keep believing!

## Leave a lasting legacy

Writing a will – and deciding what to put in it – can be a difficult task. But not writing one could end up being even worse than the stress of working out what you'd like to happen to your estate if the worst came to the worst. It is estimated that half of people haven't written a will at all – which might end up meaning that your entire estate reverts to the government (who probably wouldn't be most people's first choice of recipient).

Perhaps it goes without saying that the Surrey Union are always hugely grateful if someone chooses to remember us in their will – but it can sometimes seem like an awful lot of both time and effort to make any changes. The good news is that it needn't be that difficult. The simplest thing to do is to write a codicil and include it with your existing will.

And why would you want to leave any money to the hunt? Well, just in case it wasn't an obvious choice, we came up with this jaunty jingle as encouragement:

*As you care for horn and hound,  
Please mention 'em in your will  
Before you go to ground.*

In all seriousness however, we have plenty of plans in the pipeline to try and re-develop the Kennels site, which would make a huge difference to our hounds, horses, and of course hunt staff. But as optimistic as our plans might be, of course it sadly all boils down to funding. We know that every hunt supporter has plenty of people and organisations vying for their attention. But please do at least consider us before leaving everything to the RSPCA!!



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## **Diary Dates for 2017**

### **Christmas carols at Slade's Farm**

Saturday 17 December, 6pm

Slade's Farm, Thorncombe Street, Bramley, GU5 0LT

### **Children's Meet**

Friday 23 December, 12 noon

Radnor Farm, GU6 7PJ

### **Boxing Day Meet**

Monday 26 December, 12 noon

The Kennels, Ruckman's Lane, Okewood Hill, RH5 5NE

### **Surrey Union Hunt Ball**

Saturday 25 March

The Bat and Ball, Wisborough Green, Billingshurst, RH14 0EH

### **Hunter Trials**

Saturday 1 April, Heath Farm, GU7 1UN

### **Point to Point**

Saturday 13 May, Peper Harow, GU8 6LA

### **Family Dog Show and Countryman's Day**

Sunday 4 June, The Kennels, Ruckman's Lane, Okewood Hill, RH5 5NE

**For more information, please see the website: [www.surreyunion.com](http://www.surreyunion.com)**



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