



Legacy... Heltondale Fell Ponies

Sarge Noble Butterwick, near Askham

Common: Askham Fells

You cannot discuss Fells without the Noble family's name and the Heltondale prefix cropping up again and again. When Sarge was born, in 1923, his parents Thomas and Annie Noble lived at Moora Hill, below Keld Head in Heltondale. Thomas died in 1949 and in 1961 Mrs Noble, Sarge and his brother Thomas moved to High House, Butterwick, retaining land at both places to make a 100 acre farm.

In between the 2 World Wars when farming went flat, they couldn't give the Fell pony foals away ... But Sarge's father more or less kept the breed true, and he bred them pure on them Heltondale fells. And then after the 2nd World War when it got popular again, and folk started wanting a pedigree Fell pony, Sarge's father had the nucleus. That's why you can't hardly buy a pony now without somewhere on its pedigree, a Heltondale pony. (David Trotter)

This is an over simplification of course, because it overlooks the Peepings, Sleddale, Linnel, Lownthwaite, Waverhead, and Townend studs, where the breed survived tucked away in similarly remote places—but it is true that Heltondale, as an area, has been producing Fell ponies “time out of mind”.

The Noble family first registered their ponies with the suffix Keld Head, in the 1930s. Prior to that, Heltondale was the prefix of the Metcalfe family; Heltondale Victor was their most famous stallion who was advertised in verse on his stud-card. Around 1946 in the Stud Book Volume XXV, several ponies were registered to the Noble family with Heltondale or Keld Head used as a suffix. The pedigrees given, which go back three generations, include other ponies with Heltondale suffixes, who are all first registered in that volume.

Like many early entries they descend from mares whose names are known but were not registered in the Stud Book. You can see whole families of ponies who appear in the Stud Book in a batch around then; dams, daughters, granddaughters; and the date of a prefix appearing in the Stud Book often has little to do with when the family began to breed Fells. Rather it indicates a period when there was enough interest and money to spare on registering ponies at home. Often, ponies were not registered until they were sold.

*... all our money went on sheep ...
Well there wasn't any spare money
to do anything. (Mrs Elsie Dargue)*

*You know, in them days they couldn't
afford to register them, could they? It
was five shilling I think to register
them. (Mrs Frances Bell)*

Hence, although the earliest recorded use of the Heltondale prefix or suffix for the Noble family is only seen in the Stud Book in the 1940s, the Stud Book cannot show fairly the length of the Noble family's involvement. It is the same for many breeders: until quite recent times, the registration of a prefix and a pony name were costs that could rarely be afforded.

Sarge showed extensively and had champion ponies at many of the shows. Because the vast acreage of the fell country allowed him to retain and breed high numbers of ponies, Heltondales have been used very extensively as foundation stock by other breeders.

Mrs Greta Noble still breeds an occasional foal from her last mare, Heltondale Bonny III.



Sarge Noble (left) and his brother Thomas, with one of their Fell ponies used for shepherding.