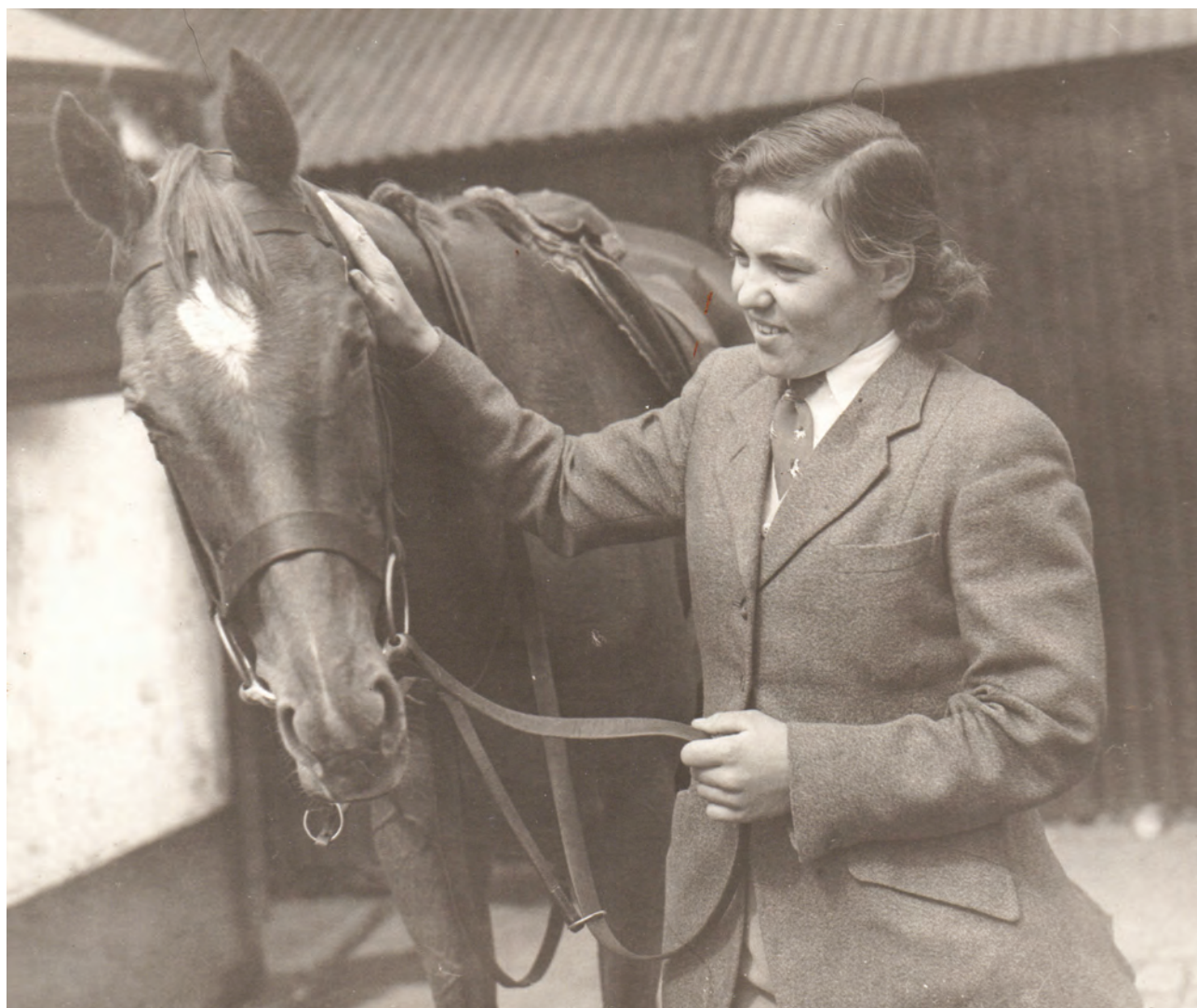


ANN FERRIS

ANN FERRIS one of our community's outstanding sports stars died earlier this year. To mark the death of this great pioneer of ladies' horse-racing, we reproduce the following interview.

In June 1984 three young 'reporters' from the local news sheet 'The 'Pass Times' went to interview Ann Ferris at her home at Jockey's Brae, Jerrettspass. Ann had made history on Easter Monday that year by winning the Irish Grand National at Fairyhouse on 'Bentom Boy', trained by her father, Willie Rooney. The interviewers were Catherine Magennis, Una Watters and Damien Trainor.

The following is based on their interview.



My family has always had horses. My grandfather was a good jockey and won many point-to-points. My father, who was known in racing circles as 'W. E. Rooney', was born in Wales and rode a great many winners all over

Ireland, including a lot at Taylorstown. He had three brothers and one sister and like their father before them, all of them rode at point-to-points.

I believe tht I first sat on a pony when I was just two.

The pony was a chestnut called 'Killarney' and a few years later when I got a bit bigger, I went to hunts with him. I hunted with him for years. The first horse I rode in a race was called 'Hill Star'. That was in 1954 at Ballyclare Point-to-point, when I was 14. Things went well for me and we won well. Actually I won my first four races, two of them on 'Hill Star'.

People regard steeplechasing as very dangerous but I don't think it any more dangerous than many other sports. All sports are dangerous in their own way but, if a young girl asked me about becoming a National Hunt jockey, I'd tell her to go and get her head examined! It's a hard game and really hard work. Indeed, I've had a good few falls and a few injuries, a broken collar-bone, a few broken ribs, ankles, shoulders and a few bangs on the head, otherwise nothing too serious. That's just part of the sport.

It's only in the last twenty years that ladies were allowed to ride in races under National Hunt Rules. I rode my first race under rules at Leopardstown, on I think the horse was called 'Meadow Manor' or maybe it was 'Onward Torro,' I'm not sure. My sister Rosemary is an excellent jockey. She has won a lot of chases and point-to-points and has had several winners in England. My father was the biggest influence on me, I suppose. He taught me anything I know. My daughter Gaye is a good jockey and my son Billy is better with cows than any of us.

I've had a few good big wins. I won the Ulster Harp National twice and the Irish Sweeps Hurdle and a few at Leopardstown and the Irish Grand National at Fairyhouse on 'Bentom Boy'. My father bred many good horses but he didn't breed 'Bentom Boy'. My late husband, Harry, bought him as a yearling from Tommy and Frank Spencer of Newry and sold him to

Mr Dorian as a 3 year-old. He's not that big. He's just 16-1 hands and very quiet. Anybody could ride him.



There isn't an awful lot to tell about the Irish Grand National win. I don't even know how many horses were in the race but everything went well and we won quite easily. I can't think of anything more about it. I feel 'Bentom Boy' could run well at Aintree provided he didn't get pushed or shoved around. I think the extra distance would suit him and if the horse stays with the same owner and trainer, I wouldn't mind riding him at Aintree.

Apart from racing I have done a bit of show-jumping. I jumped internationally for Ireland a while back. I go hunting too and I like to take part in the Sheepbridge hunt around Christmas.

We always have a few brood-mares here. We bred 'Black Spangles' here and sold her to my sister-in-law Grahamie, as a four or five year-old. 'Black Spangles' second foal was 'Little Owl' who won the Cheltenham Gold Cup in 1981.

At the minute I have a brood mare and foal and three or four race-horses. On a typical day, I get up at seven o'clock. I feed and hay the horses. I get the breakfast at a quarter to nine and then I go out and exercise the horses until about one o'clock – depending on how many horses I have 'to do'. I get the dinner and then it's housework till five o'clock by which time, I have to see to the horses again and feed them I'm hopefully finished around seven o'clock. My hobbies outside racing; I'm a big fan of Barry McGuigan, I follow boxing and rugby. I know I live on 'Jockey's Brae', but the name has nothing to do with me for it was Jockey's Brae long before we came here.

My ambitions for the future? To end up in one piece!