MARY McGRATH AND JOAN C. GRIFFITH

THE IRISH DRAUGHT HORSE

A HISTORY

'A must for anyone with horses in the heart and soul'

Irish Examiner
The Irish Draught Horse
A History

Mary McGrath and Joan C. Griffith

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In memory of Joseph J. McGrath

who loved horses
Editors and Contributors

Editors

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Contributors

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John Flynn was involved in human blood-typing during the 1970s in Dublin, where he was attached to a number of hospitals, before moving to the Irish Equine Centre to set up Weatherby’s blood-typing laboratory for foal registration. He expanded this service to the non-Thoroughbred sector, which provided the basis for comparative studies in horse-population genetics (including the Irish Draught). John and his staff of thirteen have now established a multi-species DNA-testing laboratory that is recognised as one of the leading institutions throughout the world.

Fergus Kelly is a senior professor in the School of Celtic
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Stuart N. Lane lives in an eighteenth-century farmhouse on the Meath–Kildare border with his wife, two dogs, an unknown number of cats and seven horses. He has been involved in horses all his life, having bred hunters and Sport Horses, hunted with most of the Irish packs and some of the English, point-to-point, show jumped and ridden stock horses in Canada and Australia. He took his master’s degree some years ago in Trinity College, Dublin, and is currently working for his PhD in NUI Maynooth, his subject covering the economic history of the Irish horse in the nineteenth century.

Colin A. Lewis lectured at University College, Dublin for over twenty years before moving to South Africa, where he is professor of geography at Rhodes University. For over a decade he was hunting correspondent for *The Irish Field* and a well-known judge of horses and hounds. Professor Lewis’ books include *Hunting in Ireland* (1975) and *Horse Breeding in Ireland and the Role of the Royal Dublin Society* (1986), both published by J.A. Allen and Company.

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Marjorie Quartzon has farmed, dealt in horses, cats and sheep, bred Border collies and written thirteen published books; her best-known horse book is *Breakfast the Night Before*. Marjorie can honestly say that she made her living almost entirely out of horse dealing for 35 years. She had a sketchy education and cared for her elderly parents until they died. The first of her books appeared in 1984, and she had a column in the *Irish Field* for many years. Having retired from farming at the age of 68, she is currently supervisor of the National Council of the Blind of Ireland’s second-hand bookshop, Board ends, in Abbey Lane, Nenagh.

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Recognition and Development of the Irish Draught Horse

Colin A. Lewis

Napoleonic Wars, Horse-drawn Passenger Services and the Rise of the Railways

The eighteenth century ended with the horrors of the French Revolution, which culminated in the seizure of power in France by an adventurous soldier, Napoleon Bonaparte, whose ambition was French control of Europe. Thus began the Napoleonic Wars, in which Britain and Ireland were engaged against the French and their allies. The war ended in 1815 with British victory at the Battle of Waterloo and the crushing of French ambitions.

During the Napoleonic Wars there were good prices for Irish-bred horses suitable for military use, such as troopers and animals suitable for the commissariat. After the war, however, prices fell rapidly. This enabled entrepreneurs such as Charles Bianconi to purchase trooper-type horses and use them to establish horse-drawn passenger services throughout much of Ireland.

In 1834 the first railway was opened in Ireland, from Dublin to Kingstown, Dún Laoghaire. In the years that followed, as the rail network spread its tentacles through the Irish countryside, horses were in demand to move passengers and freight to and from the railway stations. While this should have caused a tremendous upsurge in prices for horses, other events exerted negative pressure on demand.

Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Great Famine

The Corn Laws had been passed in order to stimulate agricultural production and ensure that the population of Ireland and Britain could be fed during the Napoleonic Wars, and their repeal in 1846 led to a decrease in agricultural profitability. On the heels of this downturn came the disaster of the Great Famine in Ireland. Within a few years up to a million people died while, within
five years of the onset of the Famine, another one million people emigrated.¹

Fenian Rebellion and the Land League

By the 1850s conditions were such that new political movements sought to overthrow what many Irish people saw as the colonial government. The Fenian Rebellion of 1867 failed, but was followed less than ten years later by the establishment of the Irish National Land League, an organisation that emphasised the rift between landlords and tenants that had festered in Ireland throughout the nineteenth century, and campaigned against eviction of tenants from their farms and for a reduction of rents. Ultimately, the Land League intended to transform ‘Tenant farmers into owners of their own holdings’. From 1879–82 ‘tenant farmers as a class stood up to landlords’, and the Land War took place.

In 1881 the Land Act diminished landlords’ income and, in the next three years, rents fell by an average of almost 20 per cent. In 1885 the Ashbourne Act established the principle of state-aided land purchase, which was extended by subsequent Acts.

RDS Premiums for Horse Breeding

An effect of unrest and agrarian agitation was the disruption of horse breeding, a major cause for concern to many landlords since horses were profitable and provided the means by which many tenant farmers had been able to pay their rents. Consequently, it was not surprising that, in 1886, the Royal Dublin Society (RDS), which was then a mirror of landlord society, introduced at its annual Horse Show ‘prizes for stallions ... designed to encourage the judicious breeding of horses by Tenant farmers in Ireland’.³

The stallion prizes offered in 1886 were limited to Thoroughbred stallions, and the owner of any stallion awarded a prize had to guarantee ‘that his horse shall serve in Ireland during the ensuing season, and must guarantee to offer ten subscriptions for the use of bona fide tenant farmers’ halfbred mares not exceeding four years old.’⁴

In 1887 the society offered sixteen service premiums to Thoroughbred stallions ‘suitable for getting Hunters and other Halfbred Horses’ on condition that each premium sire served ‘if required, not less than fifty Halfbred Mares, the bona fide property of Farmers’. Finance for these premiums came from Her Majesty’s government, which had promised to encourage ‘improvement in the Breed of Horses and cattle in Ireland’.

For 1887 the society divided Ireland into sixteen premium stallion districts and then appointed a local committee in each district to select mares for service by the premium stallion allocated to the district. In most districts there was intense competition for nominations and, on average, there were 109 mares inspected per district although only 50 nominations were on offer. In the Portadown district, in the north of Ireland, 238 mares competed for nominations, while 168 did so in the Ballymote district in County Sligo and 143 in Dunmanway in west Cork. There was thus no shortage of halfbred mares in Ireland in 1887, although no evidence appears to exist to indicate how many of them were Irish Draught in type. Halfbreds were the progeny of a Thoroughbred sire on a non-thoroughbred but warm-blood mare, which may well have been an Irish Draught, even though that name had yet to be given to Ireland’s distinctive light draught horses.

For the next ten years the Royal Dublin Society continued to offer service premiums to Thoroughbred stallions and to award nominations to halfbred mares. The society also introduced veterinary examinations to ensure that stallions were free of hereditary diseases that constituted unsoundness, and insisted on evidence that stallions already standing at stud were fertile. From 1892 the society published an annual Register of Approved Stallions, all of which were Thoroughbreds.

Recognition and Development of the Irish Draught Horse
Nevertheless, as the years went by, it became increasingly obvious that there was need for a comprehensive enquiry into horse breeding in Ireland.

**Royal Commission on Horse Breeding**

In 1896 a royal commission was appointed to enquire into the breeding of horses in Ireland. The commission was chaired by the Earl of Dunraven, from Adare in County Limerick. Another influential member was the Earl of Enniskillen. During the meetings of the royal commission evidence was heard from many horse dealers, breeders and others interested in horse production in Ireland. Among them was Colonel de Robeck from County Kildare, who said that in his area

One man has what they call an Irish cart horse. He has very little hair on his legs, is a very strong horse and looks like a cross of the Clydesdale. [Another man has] what he calls an Irish cart horse ... a good useful stamp of horse to get a tram horse or canal horse, but it is not a very hairy-legged horse.

Richard Flynn from Tulsk in County Roscommon introduced the term 'Irish Draught' to the commissioners:

The Irish Draught was a breed in itself, I think; they were a sort of slow hunter with clean hard legs ... they could jump well and gallop fairly fast and were never tired; they were a real genuine Irish breed.

Major C.W. Studdart of Corofin in County Clare was even more informative:

an old Irish mare is a long, low mare, about 15.2, with good neck, head and shoulders. She might have some hair on her legs, too ... she can go eight Irish miles twice a day for ... a creel of turf and come back none the worse for it. She trots ... five or six miles an hour. They are produced from old Irish blood, with some crosses of Thoroughbred blood.

When the commissioners finally reported, in 1897, they wrote that 'the number of horses now exported [from Ireland] is nearly 40,000 annually', to the great benefit of the Irish economy. The commissioners divided on their recommendations. Dunraven wrote that the south of Ireland was the chief mart in the world for high class horses for both riding and driving purposes. These horses are almost entirely the produce of Thoroughbred sires, or of halfbred sires of the hunter type.

Dunraven and his supporters added that Thoroughbred and certain halfbred sires should be used for breeding, and recommended that if they were registered they should first be vetted for soundness and that state aid should be given for the production of 'hunters, high class carriage horses, and remounts'.

Lord Enniskillen and his supporters thought differently. They stated that the majority of horses in Ireland were used for agricultural purposes: 89 per cent in Connacht, 88 per cent in Ulster, 85 per cent in Munster and 74 per cent in Leinster. The Royal Dublin Society's Register included none of the agricultural stallions, of which there were at least 816 in Ireland in 1896; neither did it include any other than Thoroughbred sires, even though there were 651 halfbred stallions in the country (these statistics had been collected by the police). The Enniskillen faction concluded that 'the needs of each class of breeder should be recognised', thinking that it was essential to register Thoroughbred, hunter, carthorse and hackney stallions. The scene was thus set, ready for the dawn of a new century, for the establishment of a new register of stallions and, possibly, a new policy on horse breeding.
Recognition and Registration of the Irish Draught Horse

The twentieth century began with major reorganisation of the ways in which government was involved in the development and administration of agriculture in Ireland. In May 1900 the first meeting of the Council of Agriculture was held, in Dublin. This was the body newly established by the government to take charge of agriculture in Ireland. In his opening address the chairman, the Right Honourable Horace Plunkett MP PC, who had already made a great reputation for himself by his work for the Irish creamery movement, stated that we ought to watch very carefully the requirements of the War Office as regards remounts ... It is already in contemplation by the Department to constitute a Committee ... to deal with this important question of horse-breeding.

The Register of Stallions

In 1901 the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland issued its own Register of Stallions and this included Clydesdales and Shires as well as Thoroughbreds. Thenceforth, there was no need for the Royal Dublin Society’s Register, nor for the society’s premiums for stallions, although some money still existed in the Society’s coffers for the award of premiums. The last of this money was disbursed in 1903, when the final ten premiums for Thoroughbred stallions were awarded. In 1901 the society had broken with tradition and among the 28 stallion premiums that were awarded were three for ‘agricultural stallions’, at least two of which were Clydesdales.

Although the establishment of the Department of Agriculture’s stallion register was generally welcomed, fears were expressed that the registration of heavy draught sires throughout the country might damage the quality of Irish horses, which were active, light-draught-type hunters suitable for the carriage and remount trade rather than slow, heavy draught beasts.

Among the opponents of geographically indiscriminate Clydesdale and Shire registration was Patrick J. Hanlon from Grangefort in County Carlow, an outspoken member of the Council of Agriculture. In 1904, partly as a result of lobbying by Hanlon, the department decided that no new sires of the Clydesdale and Shire breeds should be registered except for the province of Ulster, the counties of Dublin and Louth, and the district comprised within a radius of 10 miles of the city of Cork. The object ... was to check the great impetus that had been given to the importation of Clydesdales and Shires; for most authorities agree that such sires, if too freely imported, will impair the reputation of Irish horses.

Irish Draught Stallions

In 1903 the department made the momentous decision to offer to ‘owners of stallions of the old Irish Draught type and of halfbred stallions of the hunter type, a premium of £50 for selected stallions’. For the first time, in an official document, recognition had been given to the Irish Draught, although it was not until 1911 that the Irish Draught was given formal recognition by the listing of stallions under that designation in the department’s register. Thirteen stallions were registered as Irish Draught in 1911 and the same number in the following year. In 1913 and 1914 numbers fell to a dozen, but rose again to thirteen in 1915. No Irish Draught were listed during the height of the First World War, in 1916 or 1917, but there was a steady increase in registrations from 1918 until 1921 (immediately preceding the political partition of Ireland), from 44 in 1918 to 60 in 1921.
Irish Draught Mares

In 1911, in addition to stallion inspections, the owners of mares were invited to submit them for inspection for registration as Irish Draught. Out of 5,040 mares subsequently inspected, only 264 were judged suitable for registration. Thus, through the official government horse-breeding schemes, suitable mares as well as stallions were formally accepted as Irish Draught.

Irish Draught Horse Book

In 1918 the Department of Agriculture published one of the Irish Draught Horse Book, which listed stallions and mares. Unfortunately, none of the 264 mares passed in 1911 were included in the volume. In 1919, when the second volume of the Irish Draught Horse Book was published, it contained the statement that the Department believed that

A lesson may be learned from the manner in which the various English breeds of live stock have been improved within recent years through the establishment of stud books and the formation of breed societies.

This, presumably, was the rationale that had influenced the department to publish what was, in effect, a stud book for an Irish breed of horse, although no one yet knew whether Irish Draught was prepotent enough to breed true to type, or whether it was just a type that needed occasional infusions of Thoroughbred blood in order to maintain their characteristics.

Study of pedigrees shows that many of the Irish Draught stallions first registered by the Department of Agriculture were descended from the union of Thoroughbred stallions serving under the premium-stallion schemes of the Royal Dublin Society with mares selected by District committees for service by those stallions. Comet (1; numbers in brackets following a horse's name refers to its registration number), for example, the first sire to be registered as an Irish Draught, was by an unregistered stallion of the same name and out of a mare that had been sired by Vanderhum. Kieran Mullins of Flemingstown in Glenmore, County Kilkenny travelled Vanderhum between his own stable and New Ross in 1892. The horse was a 16-hand chestnut Thoroughbred stallion registered by the Royal Dublin Society that year. Comet (1) was a 16.2-hand brown horse, foaled in 1892 and owned by James Doran of Enniscorthy in County Wexford. Another early registered Irish Draught stallion with Thoroughbred ancestry was the 16-hand grey Forester (22), foaled in 1907. This sire traced back to a mare by a Thoroughbred named Liberator.

Carden's Description of Irish Draughts

Although, from 1911, stallions were registered by the Department of Agriculture as Irish Draught (with the exception of some years, as already noted), there was at that time no stated standard for the breed or type. In 1907 R.G. Carden, who was a member of a major land-owning family in County Tipperary, a major authority on hunters and who had been one of the members of the Royal Commission on Horse Breeding, wrote that prior to about the year 1850 there was a breed of horses known as the Irish cart or draught horse:

It must not be taken that the words 'cart' and 'draught' imply that these animals were purely kept for agricultural purposes, or were in any way of the same type or blood as what are known in England and Scotland at the present day as the Shire and Clydesdale, as there are many instances in which some of these 'Irish Draught horses' proved to be the best hunters of their time.
Carden wrote of Irish Draught as

a long, low build of animal, rarely exceeding 15.3 or 16 hands high, with strong, short, clean legs, plenty of bone and substance, short backs, strong loins and quarters ... slightly upright shoulders, strong necks and a smallish head. They had good, straight, level action, without its being extravagant, could trot, canter and gallop. They were also excellent jumpers ... No authentic information in regard to their breeding is now available, though, no doubt, many breeders carefully preserved the strain in their breeding studs for many years, but it may generally be taken that the original breeding of the ‘Irish Draught horse’ was the result of the cross of the imported Thoroughbred sires on the stronger of the well-bred mares of the country, which latter must have had an infusion of Spanish or Arabian blood in their veins.  

Whether horses of the type described by Carden were confined to Ireland is debatable. In 1912 A.W. Anstruther, in presenting a report of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in Britain, referred to ‘the old breed of Welsh Light Cart Horses’, which provided ‘light legged mares suitable for Hunter breeding’. The board had initiated a scheme ‘to preserve the native hardy breed and ensure its reproduction’, but the scheme did not succeed. Another breed, or type, of light draught horse that also disappeared in the early years of the twentieth century was the Devon packhorse; the Irish Draught was lucky to survive, as was the Cleveland Bay.  

**Inspection Tours and the Selection of Mares**

Over 7,000 mares were examined by the official inspectors of the Department of Agriculture in their tours of 1917-19, and of these, 688 were accepted for registration as Irish Draught. Details of 678 of these mares were subsequently published in volumes one to three of the *Irish Draught Horse Book*, although it is not known why details of the other ten were omitted; perhaps they died before publication. The book usually records the name and official registration number of the mare, the name and address of its owner (and, occasionally, of its breeder), the mare’s colour, distinguishing marks, height, year of birth and, in most cases, limited information as to its pedigree. In a very few cases the foals produced by the mare, with the names of their sires, are listed. Two further volumes of the *Irish Draught Horse Book* were published – in 1921 and, after the partition of Ireland, in 1932. Another volume appears to have been almost ready for publication on the outbreak of the Second World War, in 1939, but never appeared.

The three inspectors in 1917 – James Clarke of Navan; Patrick Shelly of Callan in County Kilkenny; and P.J. Howard MRCVS of Ennis in County Clare – reported that:

In making our selections of mares we adopted a good average standard of merit, and were particularly careful to exclude mares showing coarseness or signs of imported cart-horse blood. No well-made mare that could be regarded as a good, useful farm animal of the clean legged draught type was passed over without careful consideration. With regard to the stallions, in making our selections we set a high standard of merit, and we have not recommended for entry any sires respecting which there was a reasonable doubt in our minds, either on the score of general merit, or in the matter of pedigree. Our main concern was to choose animals having, in the first place, a good general conformation; and secondly, true Irish Draught character and weight. In considering the question of breeding, we have been most careful to exclude such sires as had imported cart-horse strains so far as we could trace. We were not so strict in regard to Thoroughbred
blood, and we have recommended a few sires which have one or two crosses of thoroughbred more or less remote in their pedigree. With these exceptions the selected sires come from old strains of Irish Draught horses.

The question of action also received considerable attention, and whilst we did not look for anything in the nature of extravagant action, we satisfied ourselves that the horses we selected were reasonably straight and true movers.

The Distribution of Mares

The distribution of mares registered in the first three volumes of the *Irish Draught Horse Book* was mapped by Lewis.12 None were located in the boggy lands of Erris or in Connemara, nor in those of Iveragh and the rocky and boggy peninsulas south of Kenmare, except in the fertile lands at Bantry and along the south coast to Goleen. The uplands of the Wicklow Mountains, the Comeraghs and Knockmealdowns, and other uplands in the south of Ireland, were also devoid of Irish Draught. There were very few in Ulster (including Donegal), Louth and County Dublin, which were all heavy-draught-horse areas. The relatively rich lands extending inland past Ennis from the Fergus Estuary in County Clare were Irish Draught areas, as were the coast lands along the northern shore of the River Shannon west of the Fergus Estuary and the Loop Head peninsula, but the rugged limestone lands of the Burren were not suited to them and they were absent there.

The Size of Mares

The smallest mares registered in the first three volumes of the *Irish Draught Horse Book* were 15 hands high, the tallest were of 16.2 hands. Of those registered, 86 per cent of the mares were between 15.2 and 16 hands and 40 per cent were of 15.3 hands. The typical Irish Draught mare was therefore of 15.2 or 15.3 hands. Analysis of mare height spatially shows, however, that mares were larger in some areas of Ireland and smaller in others (figure 2). The tallest mares averaged over unit areas of 100 square miles in which there were eight or more mares per area, existed in south and east County Wexford and in County Down. The smallest mares, analysed similarly, existed in the disadvantaged terrain of County Mayo and adjacent areas, where the drumlin landscape of little fields and heavy and generally ill-drained soils probably militated against the development of larger animals. Irish Draught thus seem to have been adjusted to local conditions, at least as far as height was concerned, in the early part of the twentieth century.13 Whether they were similarly adjusted in earlier times is now a matter for conjecture. Since only nine mares out of the total of 673 for which data exists were just 15 hands high, it is likely that smaller mares were not accepted by the inspectors for registration.

**Irish Draught Stallions in 1921**

The department's *Register of Stallions* for 1921 records not only the names of Irish Draught stallions, but gives some information about them and about the places where, during 1921, they were to stand at stud. The names of the owners and their addresses are also given. The registered stallions were concentrated south of a line from the Boyne to Galway Bay. There was no registered Irish Draught stallion standing at stud in what was to become Northern Ireland, and only a handful existed north of a line from Dublin to Galway.14

One of the horses that travelled furthest for his mares was Rainbow (49), owned by James Dodd, who was a well-known veterinary surgeon in Sligo. Dodd's horse was a 16-hand bay, foaled in 1915, by Starlight (7) out of Lady Dolly. Starlight (7) was a 16.2-hand bay horse foaled in 1904, by Comet (i) by an unregistered sire of the same name. The dam of Comet (i) was by
Figure 1
The location of Irish Draught mares inspected in 1917-19 and registered in the first three volumes of the Irish Draught Horse Book. Map redrawn from Lewis, 1980.
Land over 400'

+ Average mare height exceeds quartic surface value by more than .25'
- Average mare height more than .25' below the quartic surf'

**Figure 2**

Trend-surface analysis of the height of Irish Draught mares inspected and registered in 1977-19 and whose details were included in the first three volumes of the *Irish Draught Horse Book*. This map was created by plotting the heights of all mares, as given in the *Irish Draught Horse Book*, volumes 1-3, dividing Ireland into grid squares of 400 square miles each, averaging the mare heights in each square in which there were eight or more mares and using that data to create a trend surface.

Notice how mares were on average smaller in the Clew Bay region of Mayo and in the west of Cork and Kerry and highest in the extreme south east of Ireland. The five data areas in which mare heights differ from the quartic surface by more than .25 inches are shown, as is land that exceeds 400 feet in those data cells (which is shaded). Notice how mare heights were smaller in the Rathmore and Kilmaganny uplands than in the adjoining lower areas.

Presumably, smaller mares were more suitable in the uplands than in the lowlands, and farmers bred accordingly. The height of the mares is shown in hands.

Map redrawn from Lewis, 1980.

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**The Irish Draught Horse**
Figure 3
The location of registered Irish Draught stallions standing at stud in 1921. The lines connect points at which stallions stood at stud and therefore indicate some of the spatial patterns in the breeding industry. The exact routes followed by stallions between the points were, unfortunately, not recorded. Single dots with no radiating lines attached indicate that the stallion stood at stud only at that locality. The names and Irish Draught registered numbers are shown for stallions that travelled appreciable routes, as are the names of their owners.

Map redrawn from Lewis, 1979
Vanderhum (as already noted), a Thoroughbred stallion that had first been listed in the Royal Dublin Society's Register of Thoroughbred Stallions in 1892. There was thus a strong infusion of Thoroughbred blood in Rainbow (49), and it was such infusions that caused many people to consider the Irish Draught as a type, rather than a breed.

County Kerry had more registered Irish Draught stallions in 1921 than any other county: nine, although only two of them travelled appreciable distances for their mares. Justice (26), owned by Edmond McSweeney of Gerahduveen, Kenmare, travelled to Kenmare on Wednesdays, Bantry (in County Cork) on Fridays, and Skibbereen (also in County Cork) on Saturdays. Justice (26) had been foaled in 1911 and stood 15.3 hands, was grey and was by Young J.P. (12), who also stood 15.3 hands and was grey, like his father, Young Sir Henry, who may or may not have been the registered stallion of the same name. The names Sir Henry, Young Sir Henry and Old Sir Henry seem to have been favourites among breeders in west Cork and adjacent Kerry, and it is by no means certain as to which was really which.

One of the most important stallions listed in 1921 was Kildare (40), who stood with Mrs Fitzgerald in the east-Cork/west-Waterford area (figure 4). Mrs Fitzgerald lived at Clonmalt, in the hills between Midleton and Tallow. She was a renowned stallion owner, standing a Thoroughbred named Mount Edgar in addition to her Irish Draught sire.

Kildare (40) was a grey horse of 16.1 hands, foaled in 1913 and bred by Thomas O'Donnel of Buttevant. Kildare (40) was by Young J.P. (12), who was foaled in 1891 and was bred by C. Blackmore at Killenaule in County Tipperary. The dam of Kildare (40) was Molly Grey (321) by Young Arthur II (10), a sire who stood 16.1 hands, was foaled in 1895, was grey and was by the unregistered sire Home Rule. This latter horse was by one of the best-known hunter sires in the south of Ireland, Garret, who was mentioned in the report of the royal commission in 1897 as a draught.19 Molly Grey (321) was grey, 16 hands high, foaled in 1905 and bred by Timothy O'Sullivan at Killinaridrish in County Cork (figure 5).

Kildare (40) is one of the most influential Irish Draught sires. Fell (1991) has written that he is one of 'the two most important Irish Draught stallions since the start of formal registration'.16 Kildare (40) was the sire of seventeen registered stallions. Among his progeny was Pride of Cork (88), who sired another sixteen stallions.17

In 1921 Kildare (40) travelled the area between Midleton, Youghal and Tallow in order to service mares. Three years later, in 1924, Kildare (40) was sold to the Larkin family of Woodlands, Killimer, in County Galway. While there the stallion was taken to serve mares during the breeding season at Loughrea on Thursdays, Athenry on Fridays, Ballinasloe on Saturdays and home that night and all day Sunday, Borrisokane on Mondays and at home on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. All these journeys were made by train.18
but Vaughan’s comments confirm that, even in the early twentieth century, Irish Draught were regarded as carriage horses as well as workers on the land, and as horses that could be ridden and would hunt.

**Licensing of All Stallions**

The licensing of all stallions in Ireland, including Irish Draught, became mandatory in 1920. During that year there were 2,105 applications for licences, of which 1,718 were granted; 159 of these licences were for one year only because the horses were unsound or ... unsuitable, but ... for various reasons [the] Department considered it inadvisable to refuse Licences'. The political partition of Ireland in 1922 resulted in licensing of stallions in what became Northern Ireland being taken over by the Ministry of Agriculture for that jurisdiction. In that and the following year 'The disturbed state of the country operated against rigid enforcement of [licensing], and it is feared that in some cases unlicensed horses were used for stud purposes'. As far as the Department of Agriculture in the newly independent 26 counties was concerned, however,

There is ... every reason to hope that it will be possible to take steps to ensure that no stallion will be serving without a licence during the 1924 service season.

Conditions in Ireland in 1922-23 are reflected by statements in the annual general report of the Department of Agriculture for those years.

The period covered by this Report corresponds generally to the year beginning with the 1st October, 1922, and ending on 30th September, 1923. It was a year of anxiety and struggle. The post-war depression ... continued to weigh down Irish agriculture ... During the greater portion of the time...
large areas of the country were in a disturbed condition. Railway and other travelling and transit facilities were frequently interrupted and in some cases suspended for considerable periods.

Under those conditions it was remarkable that efforts were maintained to ensure that stallions were registered and no surprise that publication of volume 5 of the Irish Draught Horse Book did not take place in 1922.

Between 1924 and 1926 it appears that no register of stallions was produced. The grand total of registered stallions printed for that period in the general reports of the Minister for Agriculture of the 26 counties included ‘stallions entered in the Irish Draught Horse Book’ – suggestive of the difficulties of proper administration and of the need for cosmetic statistics in the official returns.

Irish Draught Stallions in 1939

The Register of Stallions for 1939, immediately preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, provides sufficient information to map the distribution of registered Irish Draught stallions and to show the routes they followed in search of trade of mares to serve. The pattern of distribution of Irish Draught sires was markedly different from that of 1921. Virtually no Irish Draughts travelled in east Cork/west Waterford, although they remained popular in west Cork and in Kerry. Further north they concentrated in a great belt extending westwards from Arklow, through south Wicklow, across Carlow, north Kilkenny, central and north Tipperary, and across Clare to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. From the north-Clare/Tipperary area a secondary concentration extended north through the fertile lands of east Galway and into the plains of Mayo. A subsidiary concentration existed, extending from the Killala area of north Mayo eastwards to the western edge of Longford.

Although there had been a number of Irish Draught stallions that travelled appreciable distances for their mares in 1921, the networks of travelling stallions were far better developed in 1939. Some, like Richard Barton's Irish Champion (87), almost certainly travelled at least some of their route by train. Even J. Dillon's Carrigeen Lad (123) may have used the rails, for the Dingle light railway led almost from his home stable in Tralee all the way to Dingle town, with convenient stops at stations such as Anascaul along the route. This 16-hand bay horse had been foaled in 1925 and was by the 16-hand bay horse Irish Mail (60) who was, in turn, the son of the same size, same colour sire, Irish Guard (13). That horse was by the 16.1-hand grey Prince Henry (5), who was by the unregistered King Henry by the equally unregistered Sir Henry and his father, ‘Old Sir Henry’.

What the map for 1939 really shows is that, by that year, the farming community had come to rely almost entirely upon the Irish Draught for motive power. Truly heavy horses, such as Clydesdales and Shires, were only needed in the major areas of tillage where the soils were of sticky heavy clays, as in parts of Counties Dublin and Louth and in much of Ulster. They were also needed for traction in the major cities of Dublin and Cork. Elsewhere, the need was for a horse that could cope with mainly light farm work and only a limited amount of ploughing, that could trot with the trap to market, and that could take its matter hunting when the chance arose. The horse that filled this role was the Irish Draught. MacLysaght wrote in 1939 that:

Nowadays a good ploughman, with a pair of lively Irish Draught horses, will plough nearly a statute acre in a day – a matter for surprise to farmers accustomed to the heavy, slow-moving Shires and Clydesdales of England and Scotland.
Figure 4.
The location of registered Irish Draught stallions standing at stud in 1939. The lines connect points at which stallions stood at stud. Single dots with no radiating lines indicate that the stallions stood at stud only at that location. Notice the great increase in stallions as compared with 1921 (figure 3), and the way in which they concentrate in a broad zone from Carlow through Kilkenny, central and north Tipperary, and into Clare and east Galway. These were all areas of mixed farming with appreciable tillage. The major dairying areas, such as the Golden Vale, needed fewer draught horses because of the nature of their agriculture, and it is noticeable that there were fewer Irish Draught stallions there than in the region further north.

Map redrawn from Lewis, 1979
The Second World War

The Irish Draught increased in popularity during the difficult days of the Second World War (1939-45), when petrol and diesel were in very short supply, new motor vehicles were almost impossible to obtain and spare parts for vehicles a rarity. In July 1942 the Emergency Powers (Control of Export) Order came into effect in the Republic of Ireland, prohibiting the export of horses except under licence. During 1942 ‘Licences were only issued for the export, through the ports, of old and useless horses and of Thoroughbreds’. Horses were too valuable for working purposes to be exported unless their working days were completely over. In 1943,

Owing to the increased tillage operations and further deterioration in the transport position, it was found necessary to retain in the country any horses which could be utilised as workers or vanners, and licences have only been issued for the export of old and useless horses, unfit for working purposes, and of Thoroughbreds.\(^{25}\)

In the Republic that same year the registration of Irish Draught sires reached a peak that was not surpassed during the twentieth century, even though the total number of Clydesdales and Shires was three below the peak of 81 that they had reached in 1940. During the 1939-43 period, and for a further three years, working horses played an essential, almost dominant, role in maintaining the economy of the Republic of Ireland.

By 1 December 1944 conditions had eased sufficiently in the Republic ‘to relax the restrictions so as to permit the export of geldings of all types’. The floodgates had opened and the demise of the horse as a work animal in Ireland was at hand, even though that might not have been immediately apparent, for ‘The total number of horses in the country [Republic of Ireland] in June, 1945, was 464,520, an increase of 5,654 on the preceding year’.\(^{26}\)

Post-war Exports

In 1945, following the end of the Second World War, exports of horses were allowed subject to quotas on the numbers that could be sent to various states. Under the Scheme for Relief of Distress in Europe, 300 horses were also shipped to the Netherlands. An important feature of these exports was that they included not only geldings but also mares standing under 15.1 hands in their shoes, the idea being that larger and supposedly better breeding stock should be retained in Ireland. Significantly, only nine mares under 15.1 hands had been registered as Irish Draught by the inspectors who decided on entrants to the first three volumes of the Irish Draught Horse Book.

The Beginning of the End

By June 1946 the number of horses in the Republic was just over 12,000 less than it had been a year before. In the same period the number of unbroken horses under one year of age was more than 7,000 less than in the previous year, indicating a general reduction in horse breeding.

The number of horses used ‘for traffic and manufactures’ was 10.3 per cent less than in the previous year and, according to the annual general report for the Department of Agriculture for 1946-47, ‘trade in horses was generally dull during the year’. Heavy draught horses rapidly became a rarity, at least in the Republic of Ireland. The last Shire to be listed in the Register of Stallions appeared in 1954, the last Clydesdale in 1967. The situation was not so dramatic in Northern Ireland, where Clydesdales were listed as ‘currently earning premiums’ in the 1970s, and where some still exist. Nevertheless, the number of horses in Northern Ireland declined even during the years of the Second World War so that, twenty years after the outbreak of that war, they had reduced by over one-third compared with 1939 numbers.

The greatest number of Irish Draught stallions
registered for breeding purposes in the twentieth century was in 1943, when 197 were listed. Thereafter, through the remainder of the 1940s, there was a gradual and steady decline, to 165 in 1950. Numbers declined rapidly in the years that followed – 125 in 1952, 94 in 1956 – but then increased in the economically difficult years of the 1960s when numbers throughout Ireland rose to just over 100, peaking at around 110 in 1964. In 1971 there were 119 registered Irish Draught stallions, but numbers then declined rapidly, to 62 in 1978.

Unfortunately, for the years after 1939, there is insufficient evidence to map the distribution and routes followed by Irish Draught stallions in Ireland. In any case, the days of the travelling stallions soon came to an end and it is doubtful whether any Irish Draught travelled for their mares after the 1960s.

For the post-1939 years there is photographic and verbal evidence to suggest that the Irish Draught underwent considerable changes as market forces demanded different sorts of horses at different times. Immediately after the end of the Second World War the demand was for a heavier-type horse suited to an increase in tillage and, when its working days were over, for the booming meat trade. According to Fell, this was met by the selection for registration as Irish Draught of heavier animals than hitherto: ‘In selecting these heavier draughts there was an inevitable contamination from the Clydesdale.’ Ultimate responsibility for registering horses as Irish Draught in the immediate post-war years rested with the Department of Agriculture’s inspector, Cooper. He appears to have taken the attitude that a marketable horse was more important than carriage-horse riding, for which there was little trade.

Consequently, the Irish Draught seem to have become heavier draught animals in the immediate post-war years. By the 1960s it was obvious there was little future for any horse as a draught animal, and attempts were made to make Irish Draught more suitable for the riding and Sport Horse market. This coincided with the appointment of Sheehy and then R.P. Jennings as the veterinarians who guided the horse-breeding programmes of the Department of Agriculture and, later (in the case of Jennings), Bord na gCapall (the Horse Board), in the Republic. It also coincided with the appointment of Charles J. Haughey – a noted horseman – as minister for agriculture in the Republic.

Mechanisation and Slaughter

Throughout the 1960s popular emphasis was placed on mechanisation, as if there was no role for the horse as a working animal. Even the production of pleasure horses seems to have been initially regarded as of little value. Within the Republic there was little attempt even to ensure the registration of more than a few (60 to one 100) Thoroughbred sires. An unknown hand has written on the copy of the Register of Stallions for 1965 in the library of the Royal Dublin Society, the sad words ‘dead’ or ‘sold for slaughter’ across the names of many of the draught stallions listed in that document. Seven of the 105 Irish Draught sires were so marked, as was the only halfbred listed in the register. The situation was even worse for heavy draught stallions. Of the nine Clydesdales registered, five have their names struck through, two are stated as ‘dead’, two as ‘sold for slaughter’ and one as ‘exported to N.I.’. Within Northern Ireland, only three Irish Draught stallions were registered in 1960, plus three Clydesdales, four Thoroughbreds and one ‘Other’. The day of the heavy horse had obviously ended.

The number of horses in Ireland had shown remarkable consistency from 1861 until just before 1951, as table 1 shows.

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Table 1: Irish horse population of Ireland, 1861–1980 (in 1,000s)
Between the end of the Second World War and 1951 there was a rapid decrease in the number of working horses, and the rate of decrease accelerated during the decade of the 1950s and in the early 1960s. This caused considerable consternation among a number of politically influential horsemen, including C.J. Haughey.

Survey Team on Horse Breeding, 1965

In January 1965, as minister for agriculture in the Republic, Haughey appointed a Survey Team on the Horse Breeding Industry. The team reported in August 1966, stating that

the basis of the Irish halfbred industry is the crossing of Irish Draught mares and Thoroughbred sires. With the decline in the number of horses on the land there is a real danger that the foundation stock of Irish Draught mares will disappear ... and the bone and substance of the world famous Irish hunter will disappear.

The report of the survey team led to a change in departmental policy on horse breeding and, later, to the establishment of Bord na gCapall to cater for the needs of the non-thoroughbred horse industry.

A National Horse-breeding Scheme, 1968

In 1968 the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in the Republic 'implemented a national horse-breeding incentive scheme ... divided into three sections: mare nominations, foaling premiums, and the provision of suitable stallions'. This led to a marked increase in the number of mare nominations, from 3,242 in 1968 to 9,810 in 1974, although many of the mares were neither Irish Draught nor Irish Draught in type. There was also a major increase in the number of Thoroughbred stallions registered for service under the scheme, from 97 in 1968 to 232 in 1974, although the number of Irish Draught stallions registered declined from 96 in 1968 to 73 in 1974.

During the 1968-74 period there was an influx of Thoroughbred blood into the Irish Draught herd. This may have been due to an appreciation of market need by breeders and by R.P. Jennings, the veterinarian overseeing the breeding programmes of the department who was subsequently the initial manager of the breeding division of Bord na gCapall. The market now required lighter horses than had previously been the case, and these could be produced by crossing Thoroughbred sires on Irish-draught-type mares, rather than by using heavier, Irish Draught sires on Irish Draught mares.

Richard (Dick) Jennings MRCVS

Richard (Dick) Jennings was reared on a farm near Skibbereen in west Cork, and had a great love of horses from an early age: 'as a boy, growing up, I knew the pedigree of every animal at the horse fairs in Skibbereen. After qualifying as a veterinary surgeon in 1948 Jennings initially worked in Professor Martin Byrne's large animal practice in and around Dublin, which handled large numbers of horses. Subsequently Jennings joined the Department of Agriculture as chief veterinary officer. He was assigned responsibility for the inspection of mares and stallions, and for the purchase of stallions. Jennings travelled Ireland up to five times a year, inspecting and registering Irish Draught, Thoroughbred, half-bred and pony stallions and mares. 'Mares without papers which were good enough, moved well and were good types were given papers. We had to start somewhere.' One of the major problems confronting Jennings was the existence of heavy draught stallions in the Republic, whose influence resulted in the product of 'hairy, inferior mares'.

Dick would visit these stallion owners and offer to lease them one of several stallions owned by the
Department of Agriculture ... Thoroughbred, Irish Draught and Sporthorse [halfbred] stallions, depending on what the stallion owner favoured, were leased at a reasonable fee.

Jennings also purchased Thoroughbred stallions for the Department of Agriculture, mainly at the Newmarket and Doncaster sales in England.

The first thing I looked for [when selecting stallions] was a well-proportioned horse with good-quality flat bone, good hocks and free of congenital defects. I had a preference for smaller stallions ... Small horses often have very correct conformation and can improve the progeny of big mares that themselves are not so correct.33

Jennings also maintained that

Breeders should not be afraid to use mares of 15.1 hands or 15.2 hands for breeding ... in the fall of the year ... the foals were often nearly as big as their dams.

Among the Irish Draught stallions that Jennings registered was the 15.3-hand grey, Blue Peter (536), who had many good offspring in the Galway-Mayo region. This stallion traced back in the male line via his sire, Kylemore (459), to Irish Pearl (193), Pride of Cork (88), Kildare (40) and Young J.P. (12). All these stallions were grey, 15.3 to 16.1 hands high and came essentially from County Cork, although Young J.P. (12) stood with C. Blackmore at Killenaule in County Tipperary when registered.34

Bord na gCapall (Horse Board)

Bord na gCapall was founded on 8 February 1971. Under the ‘Bord na gCapall (Assignment of Additional Functions) Order, 1975’, the board became responsible for administering foaling premiums, mare nominations, the registration of Irish Draught mares, and the purchase and location of Thoroughbred sires for hunter breeding. The board also had certain responsibilities for developing markets for non-Thoroughbred horses.

In 1975 the board included a list of stallions ‘registered with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries [in 1974] and thus eligible for the service of nominated mares’ in its Yearbook. From the following year the board issued its own publication: Approved Stallions. This publication, from 1979 onwards, included stallions standing in Northern Ireland, as the board and the Ministry of Agriculture in Northern Ireland co-operated on horse breeding and registration. The 1975 Yearbook list stated that ‘The Register is confined to stallions of the Irish-draught type, to Thoroughbreds and halfbreeds’. This suggests that even the board was unsure as to whether Irish Draughts were a breed or a type, although the Irish Draught horse registered numbers were given for all 66 stallions listed as Irish Draught. The list of Bord na gCapall approved stallions compiled in December 1976 and printed in the 1977 Yearbook indicated no such uncertainty: the stallions were shown as Irish Draughts.

Irish Draught Horse Society

In 1976 the Irish Draught Horse Society was founded after exploratory meetings had been held at various venues in County Cork. The first exploratory meeting was held at Mary Quinlan’s house at Farran, in County Cork. Quinlan had trained as a veterinary surgeon at the Royal Veterinary College in London, but suffered severe injuries in a car crash while a final-year student, and could not complete her studies. In 1937 Mary married Maurice Quinlan, who was born in Ballydesmond in County Cork. Initially, the couple lived in Sussex, but after Maurice had undertaken war
service they bought a small farm at Farran and moved to Ireland. While in Ireland Mary Quinlan became fascinated by Irish Draught. Her interest in horses went back to her pre-student days. She had trained her own horse, the son of a Derby winner, and ran him in hurdle races while she was a student.

During the late 1940s and the 1950s Mary Quinlan dealt in horses and ponies, many of which she exported to England. As her business developed so she made contacts with many owners and breeders in Ireland, especially in County Cork. She also became conversant with the pedigrees of many of the horses that she sold and with those of stallions that stood at stud in the county.

The 1970s were a sad period for both heavy and light draught horses in County Cork, as in the rest of Ireland. With increased mechanisation, the market for heavy draught animals, which had previously dominated transport in the city of Cork, came to an end. Since 1904 the Department of Agriculture had licensed Shire stallions within a 10-mile radius of the city in order to sire horses for the urban transport market. Light draught horses, which were essentially Irish Draught or Irish-draught-type animals, dominated the remainder of the county and were used on the farms and as vanners in the larger towns and in Cork city. They had also been exported in large numbers to Britain and the European continent until they were ousted by the spread of motor vehicles, especially in the 1950s.

By the 1970s motor dealers were importing many second-hand tractors into Ireland, mainly from Britain, and they rapidly replaced the use of horses on the farms. The market for light draught horses in Irish towns had also been ended by increased mechanisation and there was little economic reason for farmers to retain their light draught broodmares. Consequently, in the later 1960s and the early 1970s 'it was a common sight at fairs to see lovely broodmares going for meat, to the distress of the men who were obliged to sell them'.

There was a great danger that the Irish Draught would soon become extinct. Mary Quinlan decided otherwise and, with the aid of a small but dedicated group of supporters, particularly William Cotter, she inspired people to found the Irish Draught Horse Society. William Cotter was the first chairman and Mary Quinlan was the first secretary.

The formation of the society has been of great importance for the development of the Irish Draught as a breed. In March 1976 committee members of the new Society met representatives of Bord na gCapall and requested recognition of the Society, subsidies for pure-bred Irish Draught colts, and that registered Irish Draught mares have their Irish Draught registration numbers shown on their Irish-horse-register passports. The board was then in the process of establishing a register of all non-Thoroughbred horses in Ireland and of issuing identity documents (passports) for all Irish horses and ponies. In 1979, by agreement between Bord na gCapall and the Northern Ireland Ministry of Agriculture, the Irish Horse Register was extended to include animals in Northern Ireland. Documents issued under the register were officially approved by the International Equestrian Federation.

Breed Standard and Guideline

In 1982 the Irish Draught Horse Society published the Breed Standard and Guideline. The standard states that

The Irish Draught Horse is an active, short-shinned powerful horse with substance and quality. Standing over a lot of ground he is proud of bearing, deep of girth, strong of back, loins and quarters. He has exceptionally strong and sound constitution and is known for his intelligence and gentle nature and good sense. Height at 3 years old, stallions 16 hh [hands high] and over, mares from 15.2 hh with 9 inches or more of clean flat bone.
The location of registered Irish Draught mares that visited a stallion under the official horse-breeding schemes of 1978. Notice how most mares were concentrated in the east-Galway/Clare/north-Tipperary region and in the fertile lands around Ballina, as well as in south-west County Cork.

Source: Breeding records of An Bord na gCapall.
Redrawn from Lewis, 1983

**Figure 5**
Figure 6
The number of non-thoroughbred horses and ponies per 1,000 acres of crops and pasture in the Republic of Ireland in 1975. The unorthodox intervals used for shading are those given on the original map. The map shows that horse and pony numbers per crop and pasture area were greatest in an arc from County Louth through County Dublin and then swinging westward to end on the west coast of County Clare, and in areas south east of this arc. Numbers per crop and pasture area were understandably much lower in the boggy and mountainous regions of County Kerry and west County Cork. Numbers, similarly defined, were also low in the main drumlin belt and in rugged County Donegal.
Redrawn from O'Neil et al., 1979
The standard then stipulates the desired Irish Draught characteristics for head, shoulders, neck and front, back, hindquarters, body and legs, action and colour. This was the first time that an official standard had been published for Irish Draught.

The Year of the Breeder

Bord na gCapall designated 1978 as the Year of the Breeder and, through the Mare Replacement Scheme introduced that year, offered 'good breeding mares to approved breeders in certain selected areas who might wish to replace an existing barren or aged mare'. Although this scheme was not specifically aimed at Irish Draught mares, it was of value to the breed, as was the Mare Purchase Scheme. Under the latter scheme 'Persons interested in acquiring a non-Thoroughbred broodmare for the first time will be eligible for a grant of £100 providing the mare is suitable and approved by the Bord'. Both these schemes were introduced 'on a pilot basis' in Donegal/Leitrim, north west Mayo, Kerry, Clare, Roscommon and Galway (excluding Connemara).

In 1979 Bord na gCapall collected details of all mares that visited stallions under the breeding schemes of 1978 in the Republic and in Northern Ireland; 1,269 registered Irish Draught mares visited stallions. These mares came from three main regions: east Galway-Clare-north Tipperary, west Cork, and the Ballina area.
of Sligo. Hardly any Irish Draught mares from Northern Ireland went to a stallion.  

**Non-thoroughbred Horse Industry Study, 1979**

In December 1979 a study of the non-thoroughbred industry was published; it had been commissioned by Bord na gCapall and carried out by An Foras Taluntais (the Agricultural Institute). This study included geographical information proving that, in 1975, expressed in terms of numbers per 1,000 acres of crops and pasture, non-thoroughbred horses were most common east of a line from Drogheda to Cork, with secondary concentrations in Clare, west Cork, Limerick and east Galway (figure 6).

These (with the exception of County Dublin, which was a heavy draught horse area), were essentially the regions in which Irish Draught stallions had been most common in 1939, the last year for which information on stallions that travelled for their mares is available. The study also showed an increase in the number of non-working and non-thoroughbred horses during the 1970s and concluded that ‘The size of the non-thoroughbred herd is increasing at a satisfactory rate’. Less satisfactory, however, was the discovery that Irish Draught mares, on average, were four or five years older than half-bred mares. 

**Pedigrees**

The late 1970s and the 1980s were years in which increasing interest was focused on the pedigrees of Irish Draught. In 1978 Bord na gCapall, which was by then the body responsible for registering horses as Irish Draught and for maintaining the records, decided to close the *Irish Draught Horse Book* to all but the progeny of registered parents. According to Cotter (2003) the board ‘reserved the right to introduce Thoroughbred blood from time to time’. As Lewis wrote: ‘Effectively, therefore, the Irish Draught is at last being transformed from a type into a breed.’

In 1979 Begg traced the pedigrees of all 64 Irish Draught stallions that were ‘currently on the Irish Horse Board Register of Approved Stallions’. In a potentially libellous article she claimed that six of those stallions were by a horse that had been sired by a Clydesdale out of a Thoroughbred mare. Her claims do not appear to have been refuted. Begg also drew attention to the four registered Irish Draught stallions that had been sired by Thoroughbreds and the two who had a Thoroughbred grandsire: ‘no fewer than a further nine can claim that their dams are by a Thoroughbred.’ In other words, 21 of the 64 registered Irish Draught stallions were certainly not Irish Draught by pedigree. In fact, Begg wrote, there was only a ‘handful of sires descended from old strains of Irish Draught, once regarded as the Irish farmer’s workhorse; some say this was the traditional Irish Draught.’

Begg also traced the pedigrees of registered stallions tracing back in the male line to certain foundation sires: the Comet (1) line; the Prince Henry (9) line, and the Young J.P. (12) line. Significantly, Begg ended her article:

If Irish Draught are to be regarded as a breed, then under E.E.C. legislation the Stud Book would have to be closed in the near future to all except the progeny of animals already recorded on the existing Register, i.e. of traditional Irish Draught bloodlines providing they measure up to minimum standards (height and bone measurement).

Begg expressed the hope that the breed society will be in unison with the Horse Board on these minimum standards. Perhaps a grading system might be introduced for show
stock and working strains. This would obviate any further dilution of the remaining gene pool, small though it may be.

Begg concluded:

The whole idea of fostering the Irish Draught is to retain the inherent genetic factors responsible for abundant resilient bone ... a horse that will go on working relentlessly day after day, and show no signs of wear either in his temperament or physical make-up; a stamp of horse whose size and appearance is easily recognised as Irish Draught. It is these genes that the breeder should be trying to preserve within his Irish stock.

Three years later, in 1982, Lewis discussed breeding and the Irish Draught and regretted that ‘few breeders know much about the lineage of individual Irish Draught’, which he blamed on the fact that few volumes of the Irish Draught Horse Book had been published. He pointed out that, by using the manuscript records lodged in the Bord na gCapall archives, it was possible ‘to trace the pedigrees of many sires’. Lewis then discussed the same families that Begg had traced in 1979, but added that:

just because a horse traces back in direct male descent to one of the Irish Draught foundation sires, does not necessarily mean that the horse is a true-blue Irish Draught. King of Diamonds [547], for instance, is out of a mare believed to have been sired by the halfbred, True Boy. Admittedly, True Boy had a line back to Kildare (40), but he was nevertheless not wholly Irish Draught.

Lewis concluded that

given the present state of the Irish Draught ‘breed’, direct male descent is probably the best indication that one is breeding a ‘genuine’ Irish Draught.

Inspections and Resurgence of the Irish Draught

The published report of the Bord na gCapall team that inspected horses in 1982 encouragingly stated that there was ‘discernible improvement in Irish Draught young stock’. The team expressed the opinion that credit was due to breeders ‘and to the tireless workers from Bord na gCapall, particularly the breeding manager Dermot Forde’. The report noted that ‘There are still far too many unsuitable animals’ brought for inspection, and that ‘The types and variations of animals brought out for registration throughout the country are sometimes remarkable’. The inspectors concluded that

it must not be forgotten that Bord na gCapall has played an important role in the campaign to save the Irish Draught and the resurgence of the breed and its newly re-emerging quality has been in no small part due to the efforts of the officials and the volunteers [who helped in assessing animals submitted for registration] who have given unspARINGLY of their services over the past few years.41

Perhaps the self-praise was a reaction to the controversy that in 1982 surrounded Bord na gCapall and its registration of stallions. In 1987 the board was disbanded and, two years later, officially dissolved.

Society Registers Irish Draughts

Responsibility for inspecting and registering horses as Irish Draught was handed over by the board to the Irish Draught Horse Society in 1983. The Northern Ireland branch of the society had already been formed in 1978, and the first Irish Draught mare inspections in
Northern Ireland had been held in 1980. A sister society, the Irish Draught Horse Society of Great Britain, had been founded in 1979 and already organised its own breeding-incentive schemes. In 1988 the Northern Ireland branch of the Irish Draught Horse Society inaugurated its own foal-incentive scheme.

Appendix Irish Draught Scheme

In 1982 an Appendix Irish Draught Scheme was introduced in order to increase the very low number of registered Irish Draught mares and to improve the quality of the Irish Draught horse population. In 1986, for example, there were only 748 live registered and Appendix Irish Draught mares, but numbers increased to a peak of 1,755 in 1993. Mares of suitable type, with at least three registered Irish Draught grandparents and no foreign blood, were eligible for registration as Appendix Irish Draught mares as long as they passed inspection. The last Appendix Irish Draught mares were registered in 1992, and just over 1,260 mares were registered under the scheme. Filly foals by registered Irish Draught stallions out of Appendix Irish Draught mares were eligible for full Irish Draught registration. Between 1990 and 1997, 337 mares registered as Irish Draught were out of Appendix mares, accounting for almost 37 per cent of all Irish Draught mares registered in those years.

Irish Draught Horse Incentive Scheme, 1990-94

The disbanding of Bord na gCapall in 1987 was followed in November 1989 by the nomination, by the minister for agriculture in the Republic, of a fourteen-member Horse Advisory Committee. This was followed in 1990 by the initiation of the Irish Draught Horse Incentive Scheme, which operated from 1990-94. Under this scheme a grant of £400 was offered for every live pure-bred foal by a registered Irish Draught stallion out of an Appendix or fully-registered Irish Draught mare. This scheme proved beneficial in that the percentage of Irish Draught and Appendix mares covered by registered Irish Draught stallions rose from 44 per cent in 1988 (before the scheme was introduced) to 65 per cent during the time covered by the scheme. Once the scheme ended the percentage fell again to approximately 43 per cent.

Quality Mare Retention Scheme, 1994-99

In 1994 the Irish Horse Board Co-operative Society Limited (which is the successor of Bord na gCapall and was founded in 1993 as a joint venture between the minister for agriculture and the breeders) initiated a scheme to support non-thoroughbred horse breeding. The scheme was part-funded by the European Union's Operational Programme for Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry. Mares, selected on the basis of conformation, soundness and performance, qualified for two payments of £500 each for two foals sired by approved stallions. A total of £1.5 million was allocated to the scheme, which operated until 1999, but only two-thirds of the money was utilised. The rest had to be returned. 1,172 mares qualified for the scheme, of which 327 were descended from King of Diamonds (547), who was a noted progenitor of show-jumping stock. Not all of these mares were Irish Draught. Although the scheme was of value to Irish Draught breeders it was not aimed specifically at them and its effect on the breed is difficult to evaluate.

An Endangered Breed

During the 1990s there was a decrease in the percentage of foals sired by Irish Draught stallions and entered in the Irish Horse Register, from 38 per cent in 1990 to 21 per cent in 1999. During the same period there was an
increase in popularity as sires of what are now called Irish Sport Horses. These are halfbreds with varying amounts of Thoroughbred and Irish Draught in their pedigrees. O’Toole wrote in 2001 that ‘The Irish Draught Horse is numerically a small breed’. She then stated that ‘There are approximately 900 mares and 90 stallions in the current population’. The market for Irish Draught has declined almost continuously since the end of the Second World War so that, no matter how important they are as foundation stock for hunter and Irish Sport Horse breeding, few breeders can afford the luxury of producing them. In 1999 only 45 per cent of registered Irish Draught and Appendix mares were covered by registered Irish Draught stallions.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, a population with less than 1,000 females and twenty males is endangered. The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy considers any breed with less than 1,000 annual registrations to be endangered. The Irish Draught horse is thus, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, one of the world’s endangered breeds.

The new millennium opened with research into the genetics of the Irish Draught[3] and with a genetic evaluation of the sires of show jumpers.[4] There were also calls for a change in the nature of Irish Draught, so as to turn the breed into competitive equine sports animals.[5] At the same time there were other calls for the retention of the Irish Draught as part of the equine genetic heritage of Ireland.

In 2003 O’Flynn, the chairman of the Irish Horse Board, stated that ‘The Irish Draught horse is our native breed and forms the foundation of our Sport Horse industry’. He considered that ‘we need more emphasis on “blood” in our present sports stock [and should therefore] make more use of the Thoroughbred for our crosses’. At the same time O’Flynn argued that ‘we must keep the Irish Draught as our foundation’. In the same year the minister for agriculture and food in the Republic of Ireland wrote that ‘it is essential that an adequate number of Irish Draught mares continue to breed pure ... the Irish Draught horse [is] a very valuable national asset’.[6]

The future of the Irish Draught horse is thus by no means certain in the early years of the new millennium although the statements of the minister for agriculture seem to imply that government support may be forthcoming for the maintenance and preservation of the breed in the years ahead.
Chapter 9 – Recognition and Development of the Irish Draught Horse

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. N. O’Hare, *The Irish Sport Horse* (Navan, 2002).
17. A. Fell, op. cit.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
24. *AGR*, 1943-44.
27. Ibid.