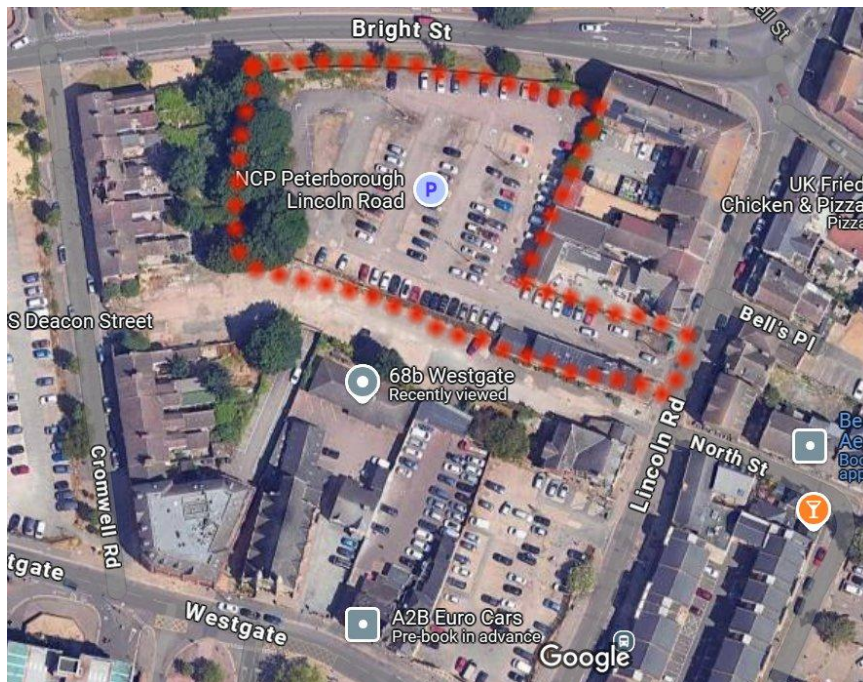


Horses for the First World War

Hidden out of sight, behind a chain link fence at the Westgate end of Lincoln Road, Peterborough, is the site of Sexton, Grimwade and Beck's Horse Repository. This is probably better known to those few people who know it was a site containing stables, as Hobson's Repository. The former Hobson's Repository site within the area bounded by Lincoln Road, Russell Street, Cromwell Road and Westgate had its entrance between numbers 24 and 28 Lincoln Road, and was cleared and turned into a car park sometime in the mid to late 70's, for the use of staff working at Queensgate shopping centre.



Left: The site of the horse repository today outlined in red.

A report in the Peterborough Evening Telegraph gives us the following information regarding its use by Peterborough's summer playscheme and gives us a description of the site:

"In 1971 the Hobson's horse repository became available. This was an area of stables between Cromwell Road and Lincoln Road which had been used in years gone past by livestock traders keeping animals overnight before they were sold at the cattle market in Peterborough either on Wednesday or Saturday.

The area was owned by the council and was perfect for our objective of adventure play. There was an area of about 20 individual stables around a central courtyard. At the beginning of summer we allocated each stable to a group of children who could then build a den and decorate them in any way they wanted. Hence the nails, hammers and building equipment".

**Sexton, Grimwade & Beck, 28 Lincoln
road, Peterborough**

Above: An entry in a contemporary Business Gazette confirming that Sexton, Grimwade and Beck's repository is the same location that later became Hobson's horse repository.

The cattle market, which was situated in the Northminster area behind the old Embassy theatre, closed in the early 70's, so it is reasonable to assume Hobson's horse repository closed around the same time. As we know the children took over in 1971, so that would fit. For our purposes we are only interested in its time under Sexton, Grimwade and Beck during the First World War.



Above: This is the wall where the cars are parked at the bottom of the repository marked with the red dots in the previous photo. We can see the concrete floors of each stable, grooved to help water runoff and aid grip for the metal horseshoes. In the gaps between the concrete we can just make out the bottom layer of bricks which formed the dividing walls. Most amazing of all we can still see the metal rings high up on the wall of each stable on which the horses were tethered.



A ring for tethering the horses.



The concrete threshold of the stable door

Horse Requirements

At the beginning of the war the War Office had a number of representatives in the district engaged in collecting horses for the purposes of supplying the Peterborough Battery and the Northamptonshire Imperial Yeomanry, also for transport and ammunition purposes. The work was being rushed ahead with great speed during the first week of the war because the various forces could not be mobilised until they had been supplied with mounts.

Captain Sheriff, the Army Remount Officer, accompanied in a car by Mr. F. Lockwood, MRCVS. Mr. F. W. Griffin of 'Boro Fen', was scouring the Lincolnshire neighbourhood, in another car; Mr. Gordon J. Wilson of the Apethorpe Estate Office was busy in North Northants., and Mr. Beck and Mr. Jos. Mackinder were engaged in Peterborough and its immediate neighbourhood, sending their purchases into Sexton, Grimwade and Beck's horse repository in Lincoln Road *above*. All of these officials, who were accompanied by a police officer with warrants, were buying horses at the rate of over one hundred a day. The Battery's complement of horses was complete by Thursday 6th and the Yeomanry was expected to be fully supplied by that weekend.



The method of purchasing was that the officer examined practically every horse he saw, and if it was suitable he asked the proprietor what he wanted for it. The price was generally agreed, but if it was not, the Government purchaser took the animal at his own valuation and gave the seller an order on the Government for the amount. Twenty-seven of the Fitzwilliam Hunt horses were commandeered by the War Office; several of them belonged to Mr Norman Loder and were valued at between £200 and £300. £90 was the full amount the War Office allowed. Eighty horses rounded up in Peterborough left the Great Eastern Station for Colchester on Thursday 6th, most were heavy van horses but there were some Hackneys and draught horses amongst them, they were destined for the transport service.

It was not expected that any of the horses taken by the War Office would ever return as they rarely survived the rigors of war. Amongst the commandeering's was Peterborough Alderman D. H. Redhead's carriage horse. Huntingdonshire contributed 700 horses in five days. The Peterborough Advertiser reported:

"Sometimes the commandeering's could be somewhat disconcerting. One of Messrs. Barford and Perkins horse trolleys [wagons] had just taken some goods to Peterborough station when a Government purchaser appeared. He said, 'We want that horse; you might as well take it out.'

Mr Mann's butcher boy was driving a smart little cob when he was met by a purchaser and was ordered to take the animal to the repository; not understanding the process, he was very frightened but was forced to obey. The purchaser went to Messrs. Cadge and Coleman's yard with the idea of commandeering some corn wagons, but they were all out and the officers left without touching the trolleys which were there".

The commandeering of large numbers of horses in 1914 soon began to create difficulty in some parts, although not intense locally. The worry was that there might not be sufficient horses for the speedy ploughing of the next year's crop. The suggestion was put forward that in such a contingency, horses in towns should be commandeered for the service of agriculture. If they could be commandeered for military reasons, they could, with equal facility, be commandeered for seeding purposes. Peterborough was fortunate, the Army authorities were not supposed to take more than 50 percent of the farmer's horses, but in other counties this rule was not always adhered to.

By November 1914 Peterborough had become quite a remount centre, 250 horses having already been transferred from the city to the Army authorities. The city was now a sub-centre to Market Harborough for this department of the army's requirements.

A short article in the 25th January 1919 edition of the 'Advertiser' indicated that things were slowly beginning to get back to something like normality. A heading declared, "DEMOBILISATION OF ARMY HORSES," and had been inserted by the Administrative County of the Isle of Ely Agricultural Committee. "Loan of Light Draughtmares for Breeding. It is desired to encourage the breeding of light draught horses, and with this object in view a large number of the best Army Mares are being carefully selected by the board for distribution to suitable custodians for breeding purposes." People were encouraged to apply by the 1st February. As we have seen, a great many horses had been taken by the Army in Peterborough and over the rest of the country, and millions had died on the battlefields. Farming and transport was still extremely reliant on horses at this time and it was crucial that they be replaced as quickly as possible.

It is amazing that the site of the old horse repository still exists, and for that we have to thank the owners of the Queensgate Shopping Centre for leaving it undeveloped and using it as a car park. The Centre no longer owns the site, but for now, it still remains in use as a car park.