

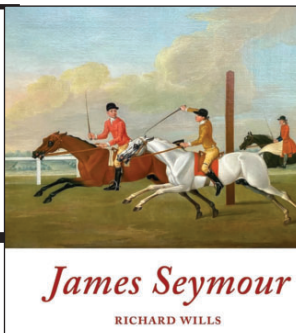
# Book Review

By John Scanlon

## James Seymour 1701-1752

by Richard Wills

Pallas Athene Books (RRP £170)



ONE OF the jewels in the crown of British racing is the rich heritage of equine art which has documented the history and splendour of the sport across the centuries.

I often feel that racing fails to celebrate and, dare I say it, exploit that heritage in promoting the sport to the full. Those of us who follow the sport passionately are drawn to the magnificence of thoroughbreds in motion, a sight so memorably encapsulated by the work of so many of our great equine artists.

In this important and remarkable book, Richards Wills sets out to give the first comprehensive account and catalogue of the life and works of James Seymour, the pioneering equine artist of the early 18th century, whom he rightly claims can be regarded as one of the founders of English sporting art.

Remarkably, Seymour was self-taught, although he did have the advantage of being exposed to the work of his father, Colonel James Seamer, a banker, goldsmith, diamond merchant and art dealer, and a member of the Virtuosi Club of St Luke, a sort of gentlemen's club for artists and art lovers. He soon became regarded as unequalled in the skill of drawing horses.

The early part of the work focuses on the lives of Seymour and his father and explains Seymour's own exploits on the turf and his rather unsuccessful career as a racehorse owner in matches and races, principally at Newmarket. It explores the factors that led to his producing more than 120 paintings and 430 drawings, and looks at the patrons who commissioned

much of Seymour's work.

There is also a separate section, contributed by David Oldrey and Tim Cox, explaining the historical context of racing at Newmarket in Seymour's time. This contributes greatly to interpretation of Seymour's work and, in turn, shows that his paintings and drawings contribute substantially to our knowledge of racing on the Heath between 1720 and 1750.

Principally, however, this volume is an academic work cataloguing in great detail the remarkable paintings and drawings of Seymour. Beautifully produced and printed on quality paper, more than 130 paintings are reproduced in full colour, with details of each work, its provenance, its whereabouts, where it has been exhibited and of any literature in which it has been discussed. Similar treatment is given to hundreds of Seymour's drawings.

Racing historians will be particularly fascinated by the number of portraits and depictions of Flying Childers contained in the book. It's estimated that Seymour must have completed a study of the great horse every 18 months throughout his career.

Richard Wills is to be congratulated for the depth and scope of his research in putting this book together. Indeed, some of the paintings and drawings are new discoveries, which have never before been reproduced. The star of the show, however, is the stunning quality of the images produced by the artist himself.

This is an exquisite volume which would grace the library of any serious racing and art historian. Wonderful to look at, the book also contains many pearls of wisdom about Newmarket in Seymour's time which will fascinate the reader.

For further details of availability and pricing, please contact the publishers, Pallas Athene Books at [pallasathenebooks@gmail.com](mailto:pallasathenebooks@gmail.com)



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