

AN HOUR WITH THE OSTLER

At the meeting on the 30th January, Duncan Jagger said he had been brought up at a garage and he wanted to be a mechanic when he grew up. He often helped his father. He told the story of how, after he was married, he ended up buying a pony that would otherwise have been destroyed and he got a harness and cart. He later bought a Welsh Cobb, new harness and original 1884 trap. He and his wife travelled 1000s of miles. The garage was sold and he had time for his passion. The Manager of the Elland Co-op asked if he did commercial work as he thought it would be nice for Santa Clause to arrive in a pony and trap. There was a procession and a band. This was his first commercial job. It was an absolute success. He bought another horse and got a licence at Haworth to take tourists over the moors.

Duncan was offered a job at the Museum of the Working Horse in Halifax and he regaled his audience with tales of what happened when a horse pulled a barge for the first time along a tow-path at Hebden Bridge with the Mayor and his wife on board. The barge suddenly jerked to a stop and catapulted the horse and handler into the canal. The Mayor's tea ended up all over his wife. An old farmer from the Calder Valley wanted a horse and cart to be used for his funeral. Duncan had just trained a Clydesdale horse. As the farm had long been sold a 16' dray with artillery wheels was hired. Duncan took a fent of black cloth and stapled it all round and screwed the coffin down in the centre – he wasn't going to be caught out! He said there was nothing better than a shire horse done up to his best with regalia, brasses, plumes and gleaming like a new pin. The farmer wanted a procession through Dewsbury. The horse started climbing up a hill, out of the town centre, which got steeper and steeper and came to a halt 30 yards from the top. The farmer's three daughters, who had followed in a limousine, got out and pushed. But Duncan need not have worried. They later wrote that their father would have thought it hilarious.

As one member remarked after an hour with the Ostler, the talk had absolutely nothing to do with family history but another commented that Duncan had been better than many a comedian!

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