

# History of Horseracing at Newmarket

Racing in Newmarket was recorded in the time of James I. Charles II was known to attend races on Newmarket Heath with his brother, the future James II. The first recorded race was a match for £100 between horses owned by Lord Salisbury and Marquess of Buckingham in 1622. The racecourse itself was founded in 1636. Around 1665, Charles inaugurated the Newmarket Town Plate and in 1671 became the first and only reigning monarch to ride a winner.

Up until 1744, the two most valuable races run at the course were the King's Plate and the Town Plate. Two more Plate races were added in that year, paid for by local traders, both worth 50 guineas - one was a race for five-year-olds carrying 9 stone, one was an open age race in four mile heats. Another paid for by landowners was a four-year-old race over four miles, each carrying 8 stone 7 lbs. At that time, formal races at Newmarket only took place twice a year - once in April, once in October. A second Spring meeting was added in 1753.

By 1840, there were seven annual meetings:

- The Craven Meeting - a week, beginning Easter Monday (inaugurated 1771)
- 1st Spring Meeting - a week, beginning Easter Monday fortnight (inaugurated pre-1744)
- 2nd Spring Meeting - a week, beginning Easter Monday month (inaugurated 1753)
- July Meeting - a few days, around 10 July (inaugurated 1765)
- 1st October Meeting - a week, beginning Monday before the first Thursday in October (inaugurated pre-1744)
- 2nd October Meeting - a week, beginning Monday before the third Thursday in October (inaugurated 1762)
- Houghton Meeting - a few days, beginning two weeks later (inaugurated in 1770)

## Layout[

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Newmarket Racecourse is made up of two courses - the **Rowley Mile Course** (named after Old Rowley the favourite racehorse of King Charles II) and the **July Course**. Both are wide, galloping tracks used for Flat racing only, each with a capacity just over 20,000, though this is rarely met.

- **The Rowley Mile Course** has a 1 mile 2 furlong (2 km) straight with minor undulations towards 'The Bushes', two furlongs (400 m) out. The penultimate furlong (200 m) is downhill and the last is uphill, forming 'The Dip'. Races beyond the distance of 1m 2f start on the 'Cesarewitch' or 'Beacon' course which turns right-handed into the straight.
- **The July Course**, also sometimes called the **Summer Course**, has a 1 mile (1600 m) straight, known as 'The Bunbury Mile'. After 2 furlongs (400 m), there is a long downhill stretch before the uphill furlong (200 m) to the finish. This course also uses the 'Cesarewitch/Beacon' course for longer distances, again turning right into the straight.



Rowley Mile



July Course

Technically, there is also a third course, the **Round Course**, but this is only used once a year for the Newmarket Town Plate, a race of great historical significance, but limited importance in modern day racing.

The Rowley Mile is used for racing in the Spring and Autumn, and hosts the majority of the Group 1 races staged at Newmarket, including the 2000 & 1000 Guineas. Up until 2010, it was the home of the Champion Stakes, Pride Stakes and Jockey Club Cup, which are now run as the Champion Stakes, British Champions Fillies' and Mares' Stakes and British Champions Long Distance Cup at Ascot on British Champions Day. The wide nature of the track means it is able to host races such as the Cambridgeshire Handicap and the Cesarewitch Handicap, which both have a maximum field size of 35, making them the largest fields for races in the UK after the Grand National. In 2005, the Rowley Mile hosted the now defunct Ascot Festival, the premier race of which was the Queen Elizabeth II Stakes, whilst the new grandstand at Ascot was being constructed.

The July Course is used in Summer, and hosts 2 Group 1 races, the July Cup and the Falmouth Stakes, both of which are run at the July Festival, the premier meeting staged at the July Course. The course is also used for several evening meetings a year, with live music after racing - these often draw a sellout crowd and are typically the highest attended of any meetings held at Newmarket throughout the year. In 1999 the entire Newmarket programme was moved to the July Course whilst the new Millennium Grandstand at the Rowley Mile was being constructed. In 2008, due to waterlogging at York, several races from the Ebor Festival were staged at the July Course, including three Group 1 races - the Yorkshire Oaks, the Nunthorpe and the Juddmonte International.

Both courses have grass airstrips for use by light aircraft, and it was taking off from one of these in June 2000 that a Piper Seneca plane containing jockeys Ray Cochrane and Frankie Dettori crashed, killing the pilot and injuring both jockeys. The plane was headed for Goodwood in Sussex. Cochrane received the Queen's Commendation for Bravery in 2002 for saving Dettori's life. The airstrips on the Rowley Mile were used during the Second World War by the Royal Air Force (RAF) as RAF Newmarket- the most important races were moved to the July Course during this period, which was the only racecourse in the UK that remained operational throughout the war.

The Devil's Dyke runs past the edge of the July course. About half of the racecourse complex, including the July and Cesarewitch/Beacon courses, is actually in the neighbouring county of Cambridgeshire.

Historically, there are various names that have been given to courses or parts of courses at Newmarket, and some are still in use today to describe particular race distances. Whyte's History of the British Turf (1840), for instance, lists the Beacon Course, Round Course, Audley End Course, Clermont Course, Ancaster Mile, Rowley Mile, Abingdon Mile, Banbury Mile, Ditch Mile and Yearling Course.



The Rowley Mile Stand and Judges Box 1895

## King James I & Newmarket



“When did horse racing start?” This is a commonly asked question that’s very hard to pinpoint to an exact moment in time. Although the first formal horse racing events in the UK were thought to have taken place during the middle ages during the reign of Henry II, it really came to the fore in English culture during the reign of King James I. It wasn’t until he established the small town of Newmarket as a royal resort, built the famous castle and began racing horses there that it became known as a major landmark for horse racing and other races began to appear in other parts of the country in locations such as Yorkshire, Croydon and Enfield.



## The British Classics



Shortly after the running of the first of 1,000 Guineas stakes race (Newmarket Rowley Mile) in 1814, the five classic British Races are established. The chosen races were the St Leger Stakes, first run in 1776; the Epsom Oaks, first ran in 1779; the Epsom Derby, first ran in 1780; the 2,000 Guineas Stakes (Newmarket Rowley Mile), first ran in 1809, and then lastly the 1,000 Guineas Stakes. Today, they are widely recognised as top-tier flat races which represent the highest level of competition for three-year-old race horses. Three races combined, the 2,000 Guineas Stakes, the Epsom Derby and the St Leger Stakes constitute what is known as the British Triple Crown of horse racing – winning all three of these races is probably the greatest achievement in the sport.