

Appleby Horse Fair

June 4-10 2009

History



Appleby Horse Fair

APPLEBY HORSE FAIR is one of the largest horse fairs in Europe and takes place in early June. It is held in a field now commonly known as Fair Hill, about one mile north of the town centre. The field was originally known as Gallows Hill, so called as this was where public hangings once took place. The fair is now called the New Fair to differentiate it from other fairs formerly held in the town centre.

The fair moved to its present site in about 1750. One reason may have been to avoid congestion in the town and thus reduce the likelihood of spreading cattle disease following a severe epidemic in the mid-eighteenth century. Furthermore, as Fair Hill lay beyond the borough boundary, the charges levied by the council could be avoided and this may have contributed to the increasing importance of the fair.



The fair has grown in size and popularity over the past three decades and is once again similar in scale to that of the nineteenth century, when it was de-

scribed as the 'great annual fair for horses, cattle and sheep.' The establishment of auction marts put an end to traditional methods of selling livestock, while the introduction of the railway as a means of moving cattle to distant markets also had a profound effect. No longer were large droves of Scottish cattle, en route to the metropolitan markets, offered for sale in passing. Nor are 20,000 sheep likely to be on the hill again as was reported in the *Cumberland Pacquet* of 1775.



The dates of the fair are determined by the second Wednesday in June which used to be the main horse dealing day, but is now the last day. Travellers are first allowed onto Fair Hill at noon on the previous Thursday and prior to this can be seen encamped in the surrounding area. Caravans range from large shining modern ones towed by cars, to the colourful horse-drawn vardos. There can be up to 900 caravans parked on the hill, about 50 of which are horse-drawn and not required to pay a fee. Wednesday is usually something of a winding-down day, as travellers must be clear of Fair Hill by noon on Thursday.

Fair Hill is a green-field site and conditions underfoot depend greatly on the weather. There is usually a queue of travellers' vans waiting to get onto the field when it is opened, in order to get a good pitch. This is particularly important for the fortune-tellers and palm-readers as there is only one main track on the field and they need to be near it to attract customers.



Appleby Fair is not formally organized, but has developed over the years as a major cultural event for the travelling community. It is, however, overseen by a committee of representatives of local government, police and other statutory and voluntary agencies. These meet regularly to ensure its smooth running, combining minimum disruption to the local residents with a memorable event for visitors, many of whom are enjoying their annual holiday at Appleby Fair.

Tourists start arriving to visit the Fair from the Friday but it is from Saturday that visitors begin to experience the real atmosphere. The main road from Appleby to Brampton is closed to motor traffic to allow sellers to display their horses to potential buyers by trotting them back and forth along the roadway. This can become very hectic when there

are several horses being put through their paces at the same time and inevitably the occasional accident happens, so visitors need to take care and keep their eyes and ears open.

There are usually several hundred horses at Appleby Fair and most of them are for sale. Travellers bring horses to show from the beginning of the fair whereas other dealers bring in wagonloads each day. Horse-trading can start as early as 8.00 am and continue well into the night. It is rare to see an actual sale, as not only can it be a lengthy bartering process between buyer and seller, but also buyers are not keen on having an audience in case they offer the horse for sale again later in the day. Indeed it is not unknown for horses to change hands several times during the course of the fair.

Although all breeds of horse can be seen at Appleby Fair, from Shetland to fell ponies and even the occasional thoroughbred, it is the black and white heavier type of cob that predominates. The travellers often have horses known as 'road-racers', which are bred from trotting horses crossed with a coloured breed. These are often seen pulling a sulky, a lightweight single-seat vehicle designed for speed.

Anyone can buy a horse at Appleby Fair. However you must know your horse flesh, for if when you get it home it is not what you wanted, you will have to wait a year to find the person from whom it was purchased. It is wise to haggle, as the original asking price is normally only a starting point for negotiation. When a mutually acceptable price is reached and the bargain sealed, then

If visiting Appleby Horse Fair please follow the police's directions and special road signs which will direct you to car parks and take account of local road closures. If you would like an info' sheet for visitors please contact the Tourist Information Centre.

Long Marton Road

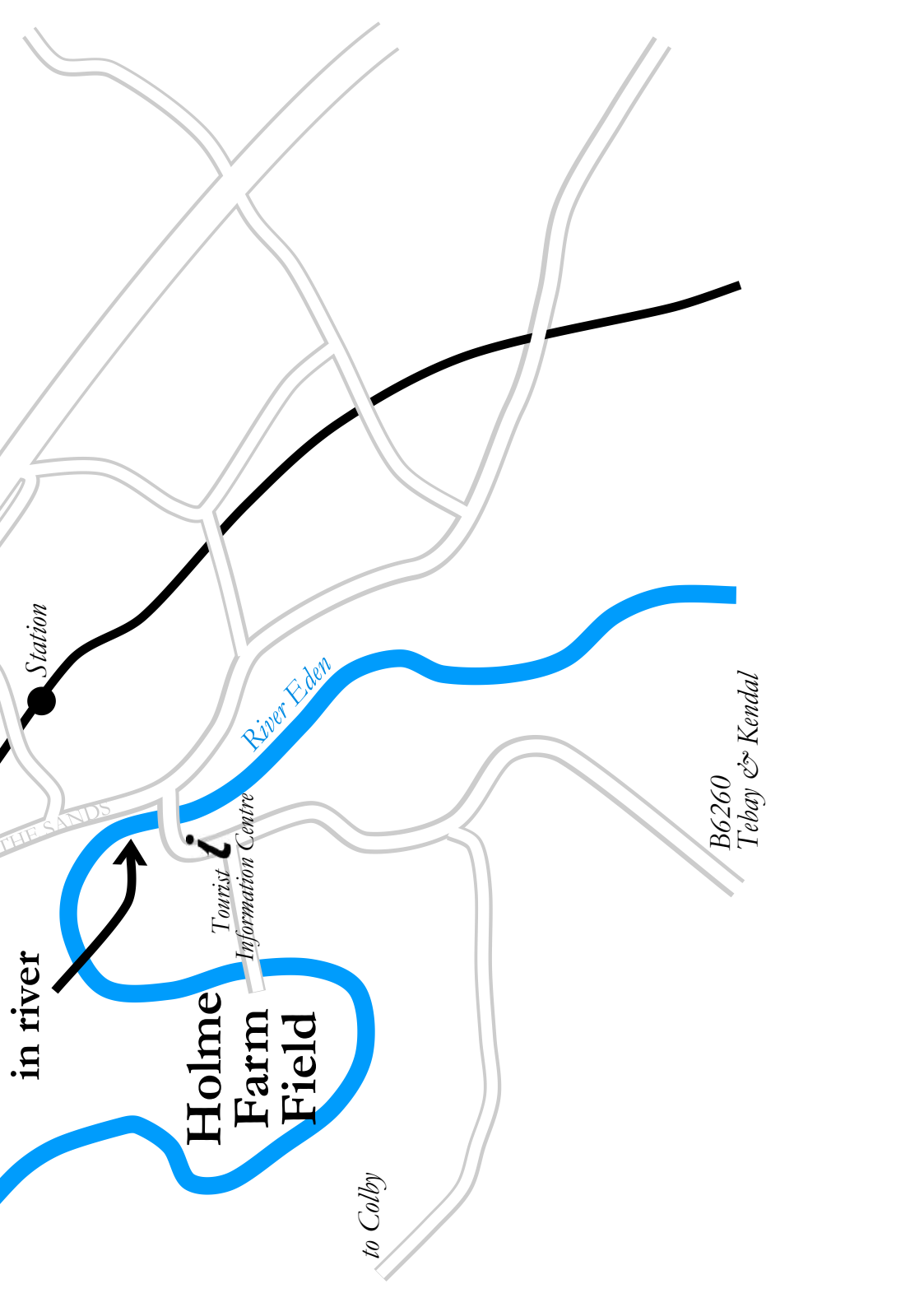
Flashing Lane

Fair Hill

A66



Horses washed



Station

River Eden

THE SANDS

in river

**Holme
Farm
Field**

*Tourist
Information Centre*

*B6260
Tebay & Kendal*

to Colby

you should ask for your 'luck money'. This is a small sum returned from the seller to the purchaser after completion of the sale, to ensure that the horse will be lucky. This may sound a little complicated but it is good fun and business has been conducted in this manner at Appleby Horse Fair for centuries.

Each day during the fair, horses are led down from Fair Hill to the River Eden to be washed and groomed ready for the day's trading. Washing-up liquid is the preferred detergent and one does wonder at its effects on the fish. Horses are not allowed into the town centre and the bridge end is policed to ensure that nobody crosses with a horse.



Horses are not the only commodity offered for sale. Originally the fair was one where sheep and cattle were also bought and sold and for centuries other goods were on sale at fairs. Today this tradition continues and from 100 to 200 stalls set up for business in the field alongside Fair Hill and all manner of goods including saddlery, clothing, pottery, books, and footwear are offered for sale. This part of the fair is also a green-field site so if the weather is wet it is advisable to wear wellingtons. Food outlets are also plentiful and are open from early morning until late at night. Most of the trading stalls are open for business from Friday until the following

Wednesday evening, but if the weather is inclement some may close earlier.

Harness racing takes place on Tuesday evening on Holme Farm Field, a few hundred yards from the town centre. The event is organized and run under British Harness Racing Society rules and consists of up to nine heats and a final. Horses specially bred and trained for this type of racing come from all over the country to compete. There is an entrance fee to the meeting, and the field in which it is held has a steep high bank that provides a natural grandstand. Bookmakers and various other stallholders also contribute to a great evening's entertainment.

If you wish to stay in the town during Appleby Fair it is essential to book very early as the available accommodation is quickly filled. Many visitors, however, prefer to stay in the nearby towns and villages, or travel into Appleby on the Settle-Carlisle railway in order to avoid parking problems. Cars can be parked in a field near Fair Hill but this can be muddy if it has been raining. Parking is available in the town but much is in a disc-parking zone and limited to either one or two hours.

Appleby Fair is well worth a visit. There is no entrance fee and a whole day can easily be spent visiting the fair and exploring the town. Many visitors stay for the whole week and use part of the time to explore the surrounding countryside of the Eden Valley, which has been described as one of England's hidden gems.

Appleby Horse Fair

Appleby Horse Fair originated many years ago, and remains the principal horse fair in the North Of England. Travellers assemble from all over the British Isles to meet family and friends and to trade horses. It is very much a horse-trading occasion; though there are stalls which provide entertainment and facilities, the main business of the Fair is **HORSES**. In 2009, it will take place between 4th June and 10th June, with the busiest days being the Saturday and Sunday - activity tends to die away after that.

If you plan to visit the Fair, we suggest you bear the following in mind:

There are horses in the road, and they are large and powerful animals close to; you have to be very aware of where and how you walk along the access routes; keep alert - use your eyes and ears!

Appleby gets VERY crowded - a small town of 3,000 people is occupied by 45,000 on the main days, naturally concentrated on access routes to the actual Fair, so it is hugely crowded. Refreshment outlets are very busy.

Parking and traffic is carefully controlled; FOLLOW THE SIGNS. You will unavoidably be involved in very slow-moving traffic.

There is a fair walk from the parks to Fair Hill - up to 1 mile - and Appleby is quite hilly. Fair Hill is grass (and mud), so wear stout walking shoes - high heels are NOT recommended;

Although Appleby is not a monsoon area, it MIGHT be wet. There is not much shelter in Appleby; be well equipped if the weather is at all threatening.

PLEASE do not drop your litter casually; clearance is a major problem - please make it as easy as possible for the litter-pickers.

Taking note of this advice will help your day to be a pleasant experience;

Have a great day!

Appleby Horse Fair 2009

4th - 10th June

Other events in the area in 2009:-

24 May	Harness Racing, Holme Farm Field, Appleby
08 June	Harness Racing, Holme Farm Field, Appleby
15 August	Appleby Agricultural Show
31 August	Harness Racing, Holme Farm Field, Appleby
29 August	Duften Agricultural Show
19 September	Cowper Day Horse Sale, Kirkby Stephen

For further information or an accommodation guide,
please contact

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