



## *Saddlers Corner*

Welcome to Saddlers Corner which features information about Saddlers who specialise in side saddles. The article below was kindly supplied by Mark Romain MBE, Director and Training Advisor of The Saddlery Training Centre.

### **Richard Godden. Side Saddle Specialist**

Richard Godden grew up in London during the war and left school at the age of 14 and his ambition at that time was to become a cartoonist. However, his parents and Uncle Les Coker had different ideas and he was offered an apprenticeship in saddlery at Champion & Wilton where Uncle Les was a Master Saddler. After being employed for six months he was indentured on a five year apprenticeship overseen by The Worshipful Company of Saddlers.

When his apprenticeship came to an end, Richard went off to complete National Service, spending most of the time in Edinburgh and Herefordshire. On his return he again worked with Uncle Les but this time at Giddens of London where he remained for a further three years. During this time he married Sheila and they had two boys, Richard and Andrew. After a short spell working with Turners and a longer stint with Swaine & Adeney, Richard and the family moved to the West Country where he worked for Colonel Moore and Admiral Place in Milborne Port. Whilst here, Richard trained two apprentices, Nathaniel Underwood and Jasper Highet, both now highly respected Master Saddlers.



In the mid 1970's Richard started his own business and it was during these years that his side saddle skills learnt all those years ago with Uncle Les came to the fore. He was increasingly sought out to refurbish and manufacture side saddles. The Side Saddle Association representative at the time, Elizabeth Turner, continually asked Richard to work on her ever growing number of saddles that she hired to riders all around the UK.

In the mid 1990's The Side Saddle Association became increasingly concerned at the low number of saddlers who were skilled in the area of side saddle work. With the ever growing number of riders interested in side saddle, concern was growing whether enough side saddles would be available. They approached The Worshipful Company of Saddlers who in turn contacted Mark Romain the then Saddlery Advisory of The Countryside Agency, the organisation that ran training courses in rural crafts from its headquarters in Salisbury.

Mark Romain met Richard in the early 1990's, when Richard was training his own son, who went to Salisbury to sit his City & Guilds qualifications and Mark had also visited his workshop in Sherborne. Mark approached Richard to see if he would be interested in running side saddle refurbishment and manufacture courses for experienced saddlers and he agreed straight away.

Since 1996, Richard has been running 4 – 6 weekly courses a year which are always fully booked. In 2000 the courses moved to The Saddlery Training Centre which was set up by Mark and his wife Dawn after The Countryside Agency closed.



Mark says that Richard is a talented trainer and his knowledge and skill working with side saddles is remarkable. Saddlers travel from all over the world to train with Richard and most will return regularly to continue their training. There are hardly any saddlers specialising in side saddle today that will not have benefitted from Richards teaching.

There are now a good number of saddlers able to undertake side saddle restoration work, The Society of Master Saddlers regularly have a Side Saddle class at their Annual National Saddlery Competition where the quality of work has been outstanding. In recent years the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust in conjunction with The Worshipful Company of Saddlers have awarded bursaries to many saddlers wishing to learn the skills of side saddle refurbishment and manufacture.

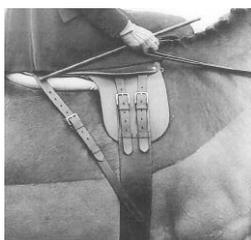
Richard is a very modest man, but it is a fact that without his skills and knowledge and more especially his willingness to share these with others, we would not have so many skilled saddlers capable of servicing and manufacturing side saddles.

.....

## Saddlers Forum

In September 2014 the Side Saddle Association hosted a Saddlers Forum to bring together interested parties to discuss the challenges facing the ongoing development and participation in the elegant art of side saddle riding.

The forum was attended by SSA Officers, Specialist Side Saddle Saddlers and Suppliers. All were in agreement that there is a growing interest in side saddle riding and therefore an increased demand for saddles. More saddles are needed and while Members have a passion for the old, traditional saddles there is a growing market for new saddles.



An exciting development is the production of a new side saddle tree by Vale Brothers Limited in conjunction with Rob Jenkins. The Saddlers in attendance were excited by this development and are looking forward to making saddles using the new tree. Additionally the Saddlers wanted to work more with the Side Saddle Association to learn the rider perspective especially in relation to the fitting and balancing of saddles and it was agreed that the SSA will look at setting up some Saddle Fitting Training Days. Other ideas to promote the use of new saddles and to develop a stronger partnership between the SSA, Saddlers and Suppliers were discussed and other initiatives will develop across the coming months and a meeting with Saddlers will continue on at least an annual basis.

The forum was a positive event concluding with a pledge from the SSA, Saddlers and Suppliers to work together so the preservation, promotion, safety, horse welfare and ongoing development of side saddle riding could be ensured.

\*\*\*\*\*