



**“Clear the way then...” Surtees Crossing the Country’**  
**Lecture to The R.S. Surtees Society**  
**Northern Tour**  
**The Bowes Museum**  
**16<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

In his speech at the Society’s Goose and Dumpling Dinner last night, Alistair Martin, our speaker, quoted the key phrase from Surtees’s *Hawbuck Grange*: “There are two things in this world that there is seldom any mistake about—the smell of a fox and the smell of roast goose.” My own story on the subject of goose, comes from my mother’s contribution, at her cousin’s request, to a cookery book being compiled for sale in aid of the Limerick Hunt, of which her cousin was Joint-master. My mother has beautiful but not easily-read handwriting. Her page in the printed version of the book read “Roast Grouse: this is a dish that can easily feed 10 to 12 people.” This must have much confused the hunting folk of Limerick. Grouse are hardly to be found in Ireland and certainly none that can feed so many. I suddenly realised that the recipe was for roast goose.

Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Surtees devotees, I have a slightly daunting task to deliver. We had our truly delightful day at Hamsterley yesterday, our magnificent Goose and Dumpling Dinner under the perhaps somewhat surprised gaze of the Zurburan saints in that great room in Auckland Castle and a visit to Surtees’s grave this morning. The priest-in-charge at Ebchester Church, preparing for a service was amazed to see us, had never heard of Surtees, had no idea his grave was there but prayed for Surtees’s soul in the service and welcomed our group of Surtees members. Now I am afraid that you, Surtees experts and fans all, have to hear me on the subject many of you know well—Surtees and his writings.

I apologise at the outset that some of what I will say will be already known to a few of you. I only hope that you will either have a memory lapse or will pretend you have.

This extraordinary building in which we stand, Deuxieme Empire at its grandest comes to Durham, would have been quite a shock to Surtees had he lived to see it. But the foundation stone was laid in 1869 and Surtees had died 5 years before.

While perhaps he might not have approved of the architecture and would have been unlikely to have had much interest in the wonderful collection, he would have been electrified by the back history of the family—that is if he did not already know it.

John Bowes, with his wife, the builder of this place, was the grandson of Mary Eleanor Bowes, in her day regarded as the greatest heiress not just of the United Kingdom but of Europe. She married the Earl of Strathmore, described by his contemporaries as “the beautiful Lord Strathmore”. She produced 5 children in short order, her husband was clever, cold and debauched and died aged 39 of tuberculosis on his way to Portugal, his constitution much weakened by his excesses. He had had to change the family name—requiring an Act of Parliament—from Lyon to Lyon-Bowes (later Bowes-Lyon) in order for him to marry and get his hands on her money.

His wife, high-spirited and in her youth much indulged by her father, had a miserable time at Glamis which her money had restored and expanded. Her husband’s female relations disliked her, disapproved of her and were cold and unfriendly—rather like that part of Scotland at the time. In her widowhood, she succumbed to the charms of a supremely rackety, penniless ne’er-do-well Irish soldier,” Captain” Andrew Robinson Stoney, who deceived her to





marry him, treated her abominably and squandered much of her fortune that had not stuck to Glamis. The sorry story can be read in fiction in Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* and as fact in *Wedlock* by Wendy Moore.

Her son, John Lyon-Bowes and 10<sup>th</sup> Lord Strathmore, while I have no reason to think that he was particularly debauched, did live for many years with Mary Milner, whom he had spotted on his Teesside estate. He only married her 16 hours before he died, in an effort to legitimise their 9-year-old son. After immensely long and complex law-suits involving English and Scottish law which ran for 5 years, the son, John Bowes was not legitimised, did not inherit the Strathmore title which went to his uncle but did get the Durham estates.

Inheriting 40,000 acres and £20,000 a year from land and collieries, he was active in business—with mixed success. He went to Eton, was a successful race-horse owner, winning the 2,000 Guineas 3 times, the Derby 4 times and the Triple Crown once. He was an MP for many years. It has been thought—though there is no proof—that the stigma of illegitimacy was not helpful. He went to live mainly Paris, bought a theatre, was smitten by one of his actresses, Josephine-Benoite Coffin-Chevalier, the daughter of a clock-maker, and married her after she had become his mistress. Shades of Lucy Glitters perhaps. However Josephine was cultivated, passionate about painting and collecting and, from the portrait of her here, seems to have lived a married life of the utmost respectability and the pair were devoted to each other. Together they built the Museum—unfinished before they had both died—and assembled the stupendous collection that surrounds us. Josephine had a mixed press in some ways—leaving aside her admirable role in the creation of both collection and museum. One critic referred to her nasal twang and ungraceful bearing and it is clear that she had an erratic temper. But then her health was very uncertain.

Scandal, bad behaviour, rackets individuals both high and low—Surtees would have felt quite at home. However he would have addressed it in more of a caricature fashion than Thackeray or Trollope and there does not seem to have been much hunting in the Bowes's life.

In this week-end commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Robert Smith Surtees's death. I want to address both the man and his books. His characters are memorable, his style is robust, his depictions of early Victorian society are vivid and entertaining and there is the bonus in many of his books of John Leech's superb illustrations and, in some books, by Phiz and Alken.

We are not the only ones to love Surtees. He was admired by Kipling. Thackeray said that he would have given all he had to have written *Mr. Facey Romford's Hounds* (and introduced Surtees to John Leech). Siegfried Sassoon recommended him to Arnold Bennett who called him "the real thing". George Orwell approved as did, surprisingly, Virginia Woolfe. What did they see in Surtees? Our colleague, Jeremy Lewis, no mean literary lion himself (though he keeps as far from a horse as he can), quotes Kipling's description of one of his characters, a high minded young aesthete—Midmore--reading *Handley Cross* for the first time:

*"It was a foul world that he peeped into for the first time, a heavy-eating, hard-drinking hell of horse-copers, swindlers, match-making mothers, economically dependent virgins selling themselves blushing for cash and lands, Jews, tradesmen and an ill-considered spawn of Dickens and horse-dung characters."*

And *Handley Cross* is certainly not one of Surtees's tougher books.

I need to remind you of the chronology of Surtees's life and speak of the late Georgian and early Victorian age. It sets the scene and we can understand the world he grew up in and the rapid changes that went through life in England and about which he wrote.

He was born in 1805—a second son--the year of the Battle of Trafalgar in the reign of George III. His father, Anthony, was the squire of Hamsterley in the County of Durham. The Surtees came from an ancient but not particularly wealthy line. According to Nimrod, the great hunting writer, Anthony Surtees was "a true



*sample of the old English squire, and as good a judge of a horse, a hound, a bottle of port wine and an oak tree as any man in England". (Robert Surtees later cruelly satirised Nimrod as Pomponious Ego in *Handley Cross*.)*

As we know, Hamsterley Hall still stands, and we have benefitted yet again yesterday from the hospitality and generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Spry, the current owners. I like to think that Surtees would have enjoyed the name of Spry and would have bestowed it on one of his favoured characters. At Hamsterley, Surtees lived within park woodlands described (even today) by huntsmen of the county as that rarest and most delightful thing—"a sure find". It was there that he learned to hunt and to love it and also slipped easily into the warp and weft of county life in a remote area of England.

Surtees's education ended at the age of 14 when he was articled to a solicitor in Newcastle and then, at the age of 17 to Mr. William Bell in London. The law was a traditional occupation for many younger sons. At the age of 23 he was admitted to Chancery but shortly afterwards gave up the law. Nonetheless, he kept a jaundiced view of it and legal profession and he describes in *Handley Cross* the drudgery for Charley Stobbs of learning the law when articled to Mr. Twister of Lincoln's Inn Square. "*Mr. Twister was one of those legal nuisances called conveyancers, whom it is to be hoped some contrivance will be found to extinguish...*"

He remained in London with expeditions to hunt with the Old Surrey Hunt based in Croydon, now—as we know—a dreary office block-ridden adjunct to South London. Here he saw the great diversity of those who hunted near London—tradesmen, gentlemen, prosperous City merchant, farmers and market gardeners. Here was the conception of one of his greatest characters, John Jorrocks, the sporting grocer from the City of London, the subject of three of Surtees's books—*Jorrocks Jaunts and Jollities*, *Handley Cross* and *Hillingdon Hall*.

He also made the first of many visits to Brighton, then well on its way from the height of fashion to its prolonged seedy decline. He made his first visit to Paris (where he sent Mr. Jorrocks too) and also to Boulogne where he was presented with a pack of hounds by Mr. Cresswell, an Englishman who was at the time imprisoned for debt.

In 1830 he replaced Nimrod as the hunting correspondent of the *Sporting Magazine* and later co-founded *The New Sporting Magazine* with Rudolf Ackerman. Thus for many years he was able to hone his descriptions of hunting which are such a magnificent feature of his novels.

In 1831, his elder brother, Anthony, died of smallpox and Robert became heir to Hamsterley. He returned to Durham and inherited when his father died in 1838. During his life there, he became a Justice of the Peace and a Deputy Lieutenant of the county. He was a Poor Law Guardian and President of the local Agricultural Society. Before he inherited, he stood once for Parliament as a Tory—unsuccessfully, withdrawing before polling day, and never stood again. He was considered a fair, conscientious and improving landlord. In many ways, he was a typical squire of his times with one exception—what Surtees referred to as "*his taste for scribbling*".

The surviving portraits show just what you would expect—a sinewy, tough, taciturn figure. A straight-shooter with no time for mawkish sentiment into whose hard-set mouth his own written words sit well—"I never push myself an inch forward, but I damn well see I am never pushed an inch back." He keeps well-concealed his extraordinary capacity for humour and the complexity beneath. It is telling that he refused to write under his own name—falling out with his publisher, Ainsworth, when he revealed Surtees as the author of the forthcoming *Young Tom Hall*, resulting in him abandoning the book—potentially one of his best—because he would not be pushed an inch back.

He acquired and hunted a pack of hounds for a couple of years—his kennels, as we saw yesterday, still stand at Hamsterley—and it is notable how, in all his writings on hunting, it is the "how" of hunting that really



interested him. In the well-known cliché, Surtees “rode to hunt rather than hunted to ride” and he makes clear his scorn of those who did not appreciate the joy of the art of hunting. In *Analysis of The Hunting Field*, Mr. Jorrocks shouts ““Old hard, you ‘air dresser, on the chestnut ‘oss.” “Hairdresser, sir! I am an officer in the 91<sup>st</sup> Regiment.” “Then you hossifer in the 91<sup>st</sup> Regiment, wot looks like an ‘air dresser,’ old hard.”

At the ripe old age—for those days—of 36, he married Elizabeth Jane Fenwick in 1841. She was the daughter and co-heiress of a neighbouring magistrate. This union was to produce a son and two daughters.

He started writing his novels and other episodic works with the publication in 1838 of *Jorrocks’s Jaunts and Jollities* and ending in 1864, the year of his death, with *Mr. Facey Romford’s Hounds* published the year after. He died in Brighton, where he had taken to wintering with his wife, at the Surteesian-sounding Mutton’s Hotel.

Why is this history important? For two reasons. The first is that Surtees used his personal experiences, the places he stayed and the characters that he met—both high and low, especially low—to great effect in his books. The second is that his life covered a period of change in society and in hunting, not least with the coming of the railways.

To deal with society first, we must remember that Surtees was in no way Victorian as convention today would consider Victorian. He was already 32, more than half way through his life when Queen Victoria came to the throne. So while his first novel was published in the first year of her reign, his formative years and some of his key experiences predated this. Also it would be wrong to think that, with the accession of the young queen, the rough and tumble of the previous thirty-odd years, the corruption, the questionable morals, the deprivation and squalor, the drunkenness came suddenly under attack and faded quickly away. Thackeray describes Lord Scamperdale from *Mr. Sponge’s Sporting Tour* as “perfectly odious and admirable” and this a work published in 1849. This is perhaps not a tone and combination of adjectives that you might expect for that time.

But major changes were afoot. The Abolition of the Slave Trade was passed in 1807, two years after Surtees’s birth and the act for The Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire was passed in 1833. The Great Reform Act, the first and major step towards a more democratic electoral system, was also passed in 1833. That monument to Free Trade—The Repeal of the Corn Laws—took place in 1846, to the great benefit of the United States. The rapid expansion of the British Empire was gathering pace.

Transport contributed significantly to changes in society. The expansion and improvement of the roads throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century meant that the coach services were frequent and fast. By the end of the reign of George IV, there were nearly 100,000 miles of public highway and 25,000 miles of public turnpike maintained by private companies—many Macadamised. This great boost to mobility and access meant the democratisation of travel. It was ironic that the sudden arrival and rapid expansion of the railways between 1836 and 1849 happened as the road network reached its peak. By 1848/9 rail passenger journeys reached 60 million. One spin-off of the railway boom was the demand for cheap reading—a boon for authors. In *Plain or Ringlets*, Surtees comments “One of the peculiarities of modern travel is the great demand there is for books, a book to prevent people seeing the country being quite as essential as a bun to prevent their being hungry.”

Surtees records the consequences of this new ease of travels for the many. As Joyce Carey comments in his introduction to *Mr. Sponge’s Sporting Tour* these include “spas crowded with husband-hunting girls and city fops, town-bred rich men playing squire and sportsman”. In the opening chapter of *Plain or Ringlets*, Surtees says “All the watering places are swarmed to repletion. Thanks to George Stephenson, George Hudson, and the many other Georges, who invested their talents and valuable money in the invaluable undertakings, railways have brought wealth and salubrity to everyone’s door. It is no longer the class distribution that used to exist, this place for that set, that for another....”





Other changes affected society. The pre-paid penny post was introduced in 1840, resulting in a boom in letter writing. Again in *Plain or Ringlets*, Surtees commented that even dukes no longer disdained to use the ordinary post to send round social invitations. Today, afflicted as we are by constant e-mails and texts, we might have a twitch of recognition in reading the following in *Mr. Jorrocks's Thoughts on Hunting*: “Pace is quite a disease; it grows with what it is fed upon. So with postage; people will soon want their letters every half hour.”

The electric telegraph, introduced in 1838 was an ideal complement to the railways. In *Mr. Facey Romford's Hounds*, Surtees neatly combines for us the electric telegraph and the railways with a typical Surtees story of horse copers hiring out an unsuitable horse. Goodheart Green is in conversation with his head man, Aaron Peacock, as to which horses to send to Facey Romford:

*“And while yet they stood debating whether to send The Glutton or Everlasting, a blue and red telegram-boy came dribbling down the yard, fumbling for something in his leather case as he came.....Thus it ran:-- ‘Mr. Martin Muffington, at The White Swan Inn, Showoffborough, to Mr. Green, Brown Street, Bagnigge Wells Road London.’ ‘That brute, Placid Joe, has no more mouth than a bull. He’s carried me right into the midst of the hounds and nearly annihilated the huntsman. I will send him back by the 9.30 a.m. train tomorrow, and won’t pay you a halfpenny for his hire.’”*

However as a country squire with experience of London and the spas, he concentrates on these and ignores the industrial revolution going on around him. The plot in *Hillingdon Hall* revolves mainly around an Anti-Corn Law candidate in the elections but that is about it. But we must remember that England at that time, whatever was going on in Manchester and Birmingham, was still a largely rural and agricultural country.

Surtees is a superb source of material for the social historian. Indeed the late Professor Gash wrote a fascinating book—*Robert Surtees and Early Victorian Society*—to which I am much indebted. The advantage of Surtees is that the reader can have tremendous enjoyment at the same time as absorbing a picture of society and mores.

Here I must turn more specifically to Surtees as a writer, to his books, his characters and his opinions as expressed in his writing. Let me start with the downsides of Surtees—to me, so much outweighed by everything else.

Surtees is not one for tight plots. In his preface to *Ask Mamma* he wrote “It may be a recommendation to the lover of light literature to be told that the following story does not involve the complication of a plot. It is a mere continuous narrative of an almost everyday exaggeration, interrupted with sporting scenes and excellent illustrations by Leech.” He is episodic—*Analysis of The Hunting Field* is nothing more than a series of sketches.

His books are quite long and discursive—though the same accusation could be levelled at Trollope and Dickens, the latter writing often at much greater length. For readers who often read the books initially in parts, it was no hardship to have a somewhat meandering prose to keep them engaged till the next fascicle came out. “He stops at every corner, looks over every hedge. He will take half a page to tell you what some minor character is wearing, what he ate for breakfast. But this is just the charm of the work.” Thus wrote Joyce Carey.

He is a social observer and satirist—and sometimes a savage satirist at that. The great moral and social issues of the day are not laid out as Dickens does. You do not finish the last page of *Mr. Sponge*, morally uplifted and outraged by the evils of society or with tears pricking your eyes as a little child expires.

His style was described by Virginia Woolfe as “slapdash and gentlemanly” and that is a very accurate description. He is a far less polished writer than Thackeray or Trollope. Surtees’s style only tightens when



he describes a hunt. Surtees feels free to wander. He luxuriates in the descriptions of people and especially clothes. Surtees has no compunction in spending time describing someone's dress and physiognomy in the most luxuriant detail. In *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*, the description of Mr. Jawleyford's hunting get-up starts "Mr. Jawleyford was a cross between a military dandy and a squire" and then continues for another page. In *Plain or Ringlets*, he decides to devote a chapter to comment on the penny post, the advantages of railways over coaches and the boon of London clubs—just because he feels like it. It hardly advances the momentum of the plot—however much it excites the social historian.

Surtees was anti-semitic—though this was not untypical of the age. His dislike was aimed at the rich Jews rather than the tradesmen and Sir Moses Mainchance in *Ask Mama* is a savage portrait. The vignettes of Jewish characters in *Plain or Ringlets* are unpleasant and made worse by Leech's illustrations. These depictions occur only occasionally but they are there.

I have delayed too long in discussing Surtees and fox hunting. He is arguably the best describer of hunting in English literature. Trollope in *The Eustace Diamonds* gives a wonderful description of a fast hunt from the riders' point of view but Surtees gives you everything—the excitement of the chase, the art of hunting, the mud, the rain, the crashing falls, the vicious horses, the hard riders and the incompetents. At the heart of every Surtees hunt are not personalities but fox and hounds.

As our Chairman, Rob Williams, says, Surtees can educate a promising Whip to do his job. Surtees can prick up the ears of an experienced old huntsman. "At last, a low short whimper, more of a catch than a note, brought out the 'have at him Brilliant old boy' and presently Brilliant threw his tongue in a downright 'I'll stake my reputation there's a fox' sort of way...and then there were five and twenty couple of hounds, and every hound throwing his tongue, making the woods echo and re-echo to their music." Trollope and Nimrod could never write that passage from *Hawbuck Grange*—for all the quality of their prose.

For hunting is central to Surtees's writing. There is no book of his—even ones nominally focussed on other social matters like *Ask Mamma* or *Plain or Ringlets*—which does not have hunting in it.

Surtees not only describes the chase itself but he gives you all the characters too. In *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*, out with Sir Harry Scattercash's Hounds, we read "They're on him!" exclaimed Wily Tom after a pause, as the outbursts of melody proclaimed that the hounds had crossed his line. Then there was such racing and striving amongst the field to get up, and such squeezing and crowding, and 'Mind my horse kicks!' at the little white hunting wicket leading into cover. 'Knock down the wall!' exclaimed one. 'Get out of the way; I'll ride over it!' roared another. 'We shall be here all day!' vociferated a third. 'That's a header!' cried another as a clatter of stones was followed by a pair of white breeches summersetting in the air with a horse underneath. 'It's Tom Sawbones, the doctor!' exclaimed one, 'and he can mend himself.' 'By Jove! But he's killed' shrieked another. 'Not a bit of it,' added a third, as the dead man rose and ran after his horse." I have certainly had runs out hunting just like that.

Surtees is also unrivalled in his descriptions of horse dealing and horses. His first book, *The Horseman's Manual* (and the only one published under his name), is still an excellent guide even though written in 1831. "If a seller affirms that his horse is of a certain value, it is deemed to be the purchaser's own folly if he believes him, and it turns out to be untrue; besides value consists in judgment and estimation, in which many men differ." There are multiple examples in his novels of dirty dealing with Surtees showing scant or no sympathy with the victim. He does not pull his punches when describing a horse-dealing establishment. In *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*, Surtees describes Mr. Buckram the dealer's servants and hangers-on: "Those about Mr. Buckram were of a very shady order. Dirty-shirted, slogging, baggy-breeched, slangey-gaitered fellows, with the word 'gin' indelibly imprinted on their faces."

Surtees is a creator of memorable characters. In the fashion of the time and much of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (with Charles Dickens the best-known exponent), the names are often signposts to the personalities. We have



the unreliable Facey Rumford, the abuser of hospitality--Soapey Sponge, the dazzling demi-mondaine--Lucy Glitters, the rumbustious hunting grocer--John Jorrocks. This applies also to more minor characters such as the scheming half-pay Captain Miserrimus Doleful in *Handley Cross*, Mr. Puffington in *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*-- "a plump, portly sort of personage, filling his smart clothes uncommonly full". There is the simpering Mrs. Springwheat in the same book.

One of the great pleasures of reading Surtees is the infinite number of personages high, middle and low, of major or minor importance to the story who light up the page. Who could resist Soapey Sponge, described thus by my colleague, Jeremy Lewis: "*Soapey' Sponge is a horse-coper, the Victorian equivalent of a plausible and unscrupulous used car salesman: he specialises in flogging spavined or ill-tempered nags, temporarily reconstituted, to credulous country gentlemen, and moving on to the next county before they realise what they have let themselves in for*"?

Surtees is not a sentimentalist. Not for him the holy simpletons that we sometimes find in Dickens. He wrote about characters he knew, the types that he encountered. Very few of his characters are wholly admirable and—even if admirable—they can be ridiculous.

He was no snob though he pilloried mercilessly the snobs around him; witness to this is that one of his great heroes is Mr. Jorrocks, the hunting grocer and later Cockney squire. In *Hillingdon Hall*, Mr. Jorrocks is in conversation with the Duke of Donkeyton: "*Pray, Mr. Jorrocks, who was your mother?*" inquired his Grace, after he had bowed and drunk off his wine. "*Please your Grace, my mother was a washerwoman.*" "*A washerwoman indeed!*" exclaimed his Grace—"That's very odd—I like washerwomen—nice, clean, wholesome people—I wish my mother had been a washerwoman." "*I wish mine had been a Duchess,*" replied Mr. Jorrocks." Surtees also loathed the smart hunting packs. In *Mr. Jorrocks's Thoughts on Hunting*, the hero writes "*Blood and 'ounds, isn't it better to be a first flight man in the first rate county than in a fashionable shire?*"

Opinion seems to be divided as to whether Surtees's attitude to women is to be deplored. It is true that his books are filled with scheming Mammams and husband-hunting girls. (He even wrote an article—*Thoughts on Fortune Hunting*—for *Ainsworth's Magazine*.) There are only a few admirable women in his books-- and even they with flaws--and plenty of battle-axes. There are many young girls educated with the objective of catching an husband. Witness Surtees's description of the Yammerton girls in *Ask Mamma*: "*[they] were very pretty and very highly educated—that is to say they could do anything that is useless—play, draw, sing, dance, make wax flowers, bead-stands, do decorative gilding and crochet work...*".

But there are many points to be made in Surtees's defence. He had four sisters, a wife and two daughters so he was not exactly ignorant about women—though he certainly does not try put women on a pedestal. His focus on husband-hunting was the norm for fiction of the previous fifty to seventy years and remained so for many decades to come. In addition Surtees tends to invert the tradition that the man was the active player. Mrs. Pringle in *Ask Mamma*, in a letter of advice to her beloved son, Billy, wrote: "*The stupidest woman that was ever born, is better than the cleverest man in love affairs.*" Who could not enjoy the vignette in *Handley Cross* of "*the overpowering Mrs. Flummocks, known in the matrimonial market as 'the Crusher,' from the summary way she settles little gentlemen's pretensions who make up to her towering daughters*"?

Surtees, in his unsnobbish way, clearly admired certain women who would not have met the approval of a genteel novelist. His most famous female creation, Lucy Glitters, "*the beautiful and tolerably virtuous Miss Glitters, of the Astley's Royal Amphitheatre*" as he first describes her in *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*. She rode like the wind, outdoing many of the men: "*Clear the way, then!*" exclaimed Miss Glitters, putting her horse back, her bright eyes flashing as she spoke. She....touched him with the whip, and in an instant she was high in the air, landing safely on the far side." She is in at the kill and is awarded the brush by Soapey Sponge. She is a loyal friend, though with few illusions. It is a moment of genuine pathos when her erstwhile friend,



the Countess of Caperington (previously Lady Scattercash and, before that, Miss Spangles of the Theatre Royal, Bungington) finally exposes her and Lucy rides slowly away sobbing.

There is Miss de Glancey in *Ask Mamma* who captivates the priapic Earl of Ladythorne and of whom Mrs. Pringle in a letter to her son, Billy, says *“Beware of Miss de Glancey. She is the most determined coquette, and if she had fifty suitors, wouldn’t be happy if she saw another woman with one, without trying to get him from her. She hasn’t a halfpenny.”* She is beautiful, she rides superbly, she can hold her own in conversation with any man. Surtees clearly admires and understands women with such traits.

Servants in Surtees are also some of his most memorable characters—both the domestic and outdoors varieties. In the census of 1841, the second largest category of employment—after agriculture-- was domestic servants, at nearly a million. Their lives were intimately entwined with those of their employers.

Surtees spares them little. They can be drunken and insolent—like Mr. Jorrocks’s immortal huntsman, James Pigg, who also fathered two illegitimate children on Betsy, the cook. Or they can be drunken and incompetent like Mrs. Hogslard, taken on by the unsuspecting and unfortunate household of Major Guineafowle in *Young Tom Hall*. In *Mr. Facey Rumford’s Hounds*, Lucy Glitters, masquerading as Mrs. Somerville, the widow of an Indian officer, tours Beldon Hall with the housekeeper, Mrs. Mustard. The household also includes Mrs. Mustard’s three daughters. *“...like the mother, so slovenly and slatternly when not en grand costume, as to have earned for themselves the sobriquet of the Dirties, Mrs. Mustard herself being called Dirty No. 1; Miss Bridget Mustard, Dirty no. 2; Miss Agatha, Dirty No. 3; while Ruth, the youngest and prettiest of the whole.....was designated Dirtiest of the Dirty.”*

I have not, for lack of time and the certainty of trying your patience, said anything about Surtees depictions of country life--of farmers and suchlike. I will leave you to remember such astonishing events as Farmer Heavytail’s transvestite Harvest Home in *Hillingdon Hall*—a pagan saturnalia surely drawn from life.

There is also not time to go in length into Surtees and his illustrators—particularly the pairing of genius of Surtees with John Leech who illustrated five of Surtees’s eight and a half novels. Our fellow member, Mr. Colin Franklin has written eloquently on Surtees and Leech and has been able to acquire, as some of us have been lucky to see for ourselves, not only a number of the original watercolours but also some of woodblocks for Leech’s illustrations which display a delicacy of design and line which is all but impossible to reproduce in the actual books. They make one understand John Ruskin’s comment on Leech *“...in flexibility and lightness of pencilling, nothing but the best outlines of Italian masters with the silver point can be compared.”*

Surtees deserves to flourish. Let me apply Mr. Jorrock’s famous horse recipe to Surtees:--*“to be to his faults a little blind, and to his virtues ever kind.”* He was robust, straight-talking and open-handed. Whether you love him for his literary qualities, his unforgettable characters, his hilarious set pieces, the hunting stories or, for which historians bless him, as an unrivalled source of material on Regency, Williamite and early Victorian society, he should not be confined to the top shelves of mouldering libraries in country houses or the dusty cabinets of second-hand bookshops.

Thank you.