

# LEICESTERSHIRE HUNTING PICTURES





# FOREWORD

THE aim of the Festival of Britain is to show the world all aspects of our way of life. Foxhunting has been for two hundred years a characteristic of English social life, it has been particularly associated with Leicestershire and it has been illustrated by an interesting and peculiarly English school of painters and engravers.

These reasons were, in themselves, strong ones for contemplating an exhibition of hunting pictures in Leicester in Festival Year. The facts that many of the most important pictures were executed in Leicestershire, that they depict Leicestershire people or the Leicestershire scene and that they were available in Leicestershire houses, were additional and convincing reasons for deciding to collect such an exhibition.

The exhibition consists of pictures closely associated with Leicestershire and hunting—no attempt has been made to cover the whole range of sporting art and artists, though a few pictures not strictly within the terms of reference have been included because they were available and too interesting to be left out.

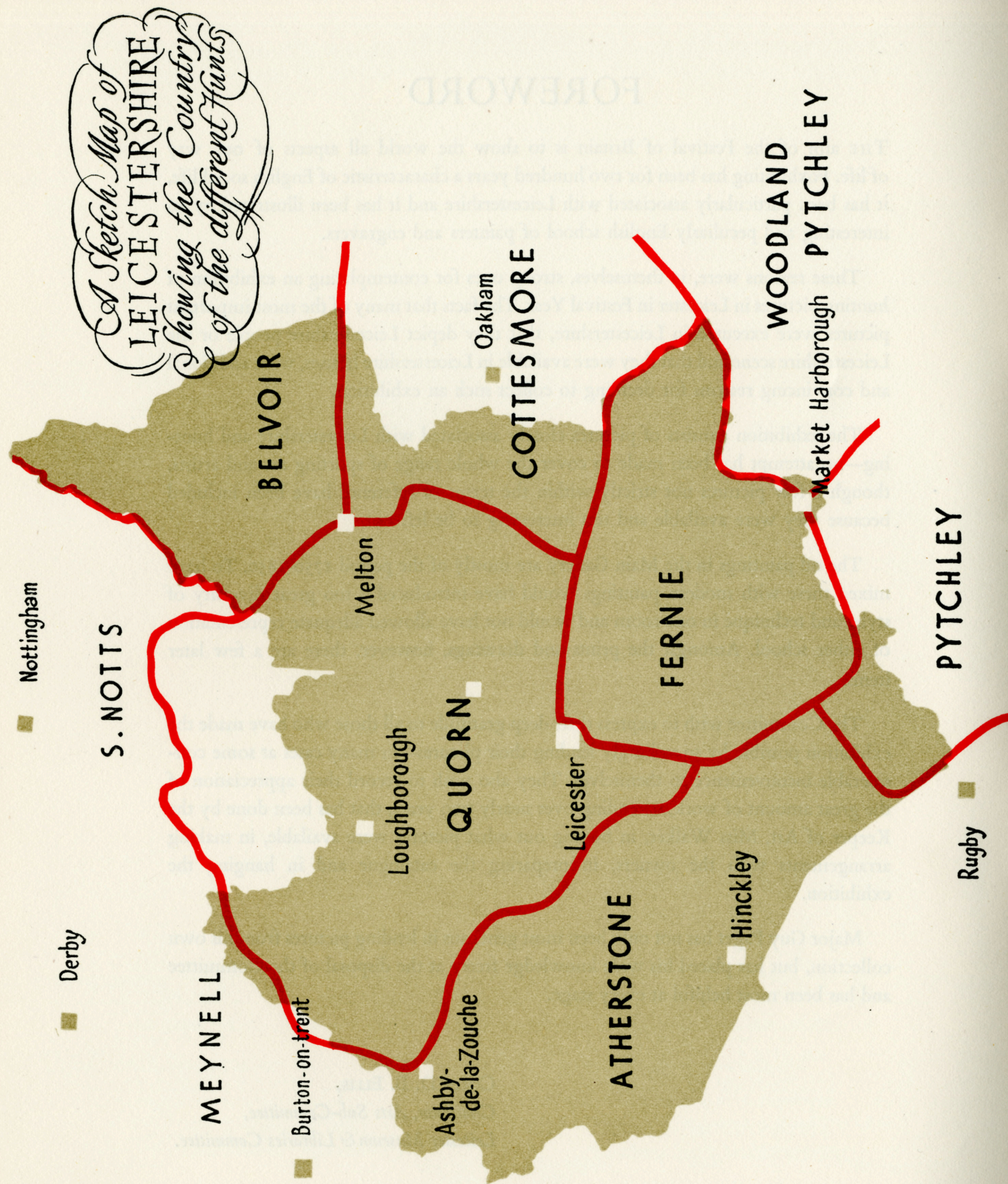
The oil paintings in the Main Gallery are mostly of the period 1750-1850. To have mixed these with modern paintings would have introduced a too great diversity of styles and technique in one room and would not have allowed adequate representation of either school. Amongst the prints and drawings, however, there are a few later items.

The Committee wish to express their deep gratitude to all those who have made the exhibition possible by so willingly lending their pictures—in many cases at some considerable inconvenience to themselves. They also wish to record their appreciation of the great amount of work, extending over nearly two years, that has been done by the Keeper of Art, Miss Walker, in finding out what pictures were available, in making arrangements with the owners, in preparing the catalogue and in hanging the exhibition.

Major Guy Paget has not only been most generous in lending pictures from his own collection, but has placed his wide knowledge freely at the disposal of the Committee and has been most helpful at every stage.

COLIN D. B. ELLIS,  
*Chairman, Arts Sub-Committee,  
Leicester Museum & Libraries Committee.*





## INTRODUCTION

LEICESTERSHIRE'S chief contribution to the artistic development of the country has been in the field of hunting pictures. The few first-class artists of the county all seem to have belonged to that great school of animal painters of the 18th and 19th Centuries, England's most noteworthy indigenous school of painting.

These pictures will no doubt give great satisfaction to all our festival visitors, not only by reason of their intrinsic beauty and subject interest, but because it will confirm for them, in their prejudice, that Hunting is Leicestershire's only occupation. In their long and enthusiastic search for local material they will be delighted to find a native reserve at last!

But to get on with the paintings: first comes along a jolly old Squire, Charles Loraine Smith, Esq., of Enderby Hall, (1751-1835), M.P. for Leicester. How he would have enjoyed himself here with all his old friends and proteges round him! Although his drawing is often faulty, the Squire had a considerable influence on contemporary sporting artists, especially in the school of George Stubbs, A.R.A. (1724-1806). Where Stubbs taught anatomy, Smith taught design and truth. Around him gathered a small band of sporting painters. The first was John Boulton, (1745?-1812). Boulton was influenced by both Gainsborough and Stubbs. His pictures, which have often been mistaken for those of Stubbs, are few in number and nearly all portraits of horses or cattle.

Next comes Morland, (1763-1804), drunken, dishonest, unreliable, but what a lovable artist! He was the Squire's "adopted," prodigal son, whom he had dragged out of a London Sponging-house, where he was drowning his genius in gin. He brought him down to Leicester Forest, sobered him up and forced him to paint those farm scenes, which have made him famous all over the world.

Then we have Ben Marshall, (1767-1835), the protege of another Leicestershire M.P., Mr. Pochin of Barkby, who commissioned the study of hunters in this exhibition. Marshall was apprenticed to L. R. Abbott, R.A., and remained a portrait painter all his life. He only turned to animals because he found the country squire would pay more for a painting of his horse than of his wife. His big hunting pictures are only a collection of portraits, done on small wooden panels and fitting, often rather objectlessly, into a background.

From the sporting point of view, Ben Marshall's paintings are not a patch on the Hunt Scurries of his pupil John Ferneley, (1782-1860), of Melton Mowbray. The Duke



of Rutland saw a crude cartoon of the great Billesdon Coplow Run of 1800 hanging up in the wheelwright's shop at Thrussington, and in spite of all the elder Ferneley could say, he packed young John off to Ben Marshall, who had already won fame in London. The Ferneley family are Leicester's very own: John Sen., John Jun., of York, (1815-1862), lazy Claud Loraine, (1822-1891), godson of the Squire and Sarah who painted landscapes with figures and country scenes. To their credit, they never attempted to follow the rather common habit of the day, of passing off their own work as that of their father.

Ferneley had a very famous pupil, a Mr. Grant, who hunted for a season or two at Melton, but not having enough horses to hunt six days a week, he took painting lessons. When he could no longer run to two days, he turned professional and ended up Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A. (1803-1878). The "Melton Hunt Breakfast" of which the one in the exhibition is the Belvoir Castle version is one of his most well known sporting pictures. We can claim Sir Francis Grant for Leicestershire in that he not only painted at Melton, but he preferred the simple beauty of Melton church to the splendour of St. Paul's Cathedral as his last resting place.

Henry Alken, (1785-1851), another sporting artist, was born in London. He soon became a naturalised colonist of Meltonia. He was an illustrator, or rather THE illustrator of English country sports and pastimes, rivalled only by rollicking Tom Rowlandson. He started as a miniature painter and remained one till his death. The bigger the canvas, the more this defect stands out and his watercolours are usually better than his oils. The reproductions of his work are endless. He was a member of a clan, who used the signature H. and S. Alken, quite indiscriminately from 1780 to 1894! In spite of this, there is no mistaking a good Sam, (1756-1815), or a good Henry Sen., or a first-class set of hand coloured aquatints (for all contemporary Alken coloured prints are hand done) for anything else.

We hope that this exhibition will be interesting to many people and that it will help to put this school of sporting painters in their proper place in the ranks of English artists.

GUY PAGET, D.L., F.R.HIST.S.