

FOREST FIREBOY AND FOREST LADY STAR NEVILLE GRIFFIN

After making enquiries to the Griffin family at Dargle, I received an e-mail from Norma Griffin, wife of the grandson of E N Griffin: “Our grandson, Michael Griffin, forwarded your letter to us about my husband’s grandfather, Edward Neville Griffin, known as Neville, having imported Welsh Ponies in 1917, over a hundred years ago now! Sadly, despite questioning the few close family members who are left, no one can tell me anything about them, other than one who says she remembers being told by her father, also Edward Neville, that his father had imported some Welsh Ponies. This lady has some of the family photographs, but none of ponies. All I can tell you about the first Edward Neville, is that he was “mad about horses” generally and played some of the earliest Polo in this area, in fact one of the family stories is that he used to take his carriage to Pietermaritzburg to play Polo there, using the carriage horses as his mounts; and after a rest, then return to Dargle with the same horses, in the same manner!” Sir Duncan McKenzie mentions that a team had a match against the military in Pietermaritzburg ‘which took place on very hard ground which the military had made on the flat on the Fort Napier side of the Botanical Garden Road, close under the hill’, presumably the same match Neville described to his family.

The Dargle Polo Club was undoubtedly the first **civilian** polo club to be established in South Africa when the inaugural meeting was held at the Dargle Hotel on Saturday, 11 August, 1886, when it was agreed to form this club. It was decided to use the Garrison Polo Club rules and ponies were limited to 14hh. Before this, all the polo clubs were established and operated by the military, many of the British forces having served in India before. Although Neville Griffin does not appear to have attended the inaugural meeting both him and his brother Geoff Griffin were active playing members. A polo ground was established in front of the Dargle store and after practice the members conveniently retired to the Dargle Hotel, about 400m down the road, owned by the mother of one of the members, Sydney Singleton! A pavilion was built and Neville and Geoff Griffin contributed the slabs for this enterprise. The first polo tournament of the Dargle polo club recorded was having being held on 24 March 1893 which had the following as their First team¹ No 1 P D Kimber, No 2 E N Griffin, No 3 S O Hart-Davis and No 4 S Singleton. The Second Team was 1 G Griffin, 2 W D Kimber, 3 J Chadwick 4

¹ No 1 is the goal scoring Forward, the Attacker; No 2, the Midfielder is the Feed; No 3 the Pivot, defending and attacking, and No 4 the Back, defending the goal

D McKenzie. They played Nottingham Road and the 3rd Dragoons. Dargle First won the tournament. Their colours were dark blue hoops on a white background as shown below.



*The Dargle Team. Winners of the Durban Tournament (Woods Cup) in 1896 and 1897. This club disbanded in 1902 but formed the nucleus of numerous clubs in the Natal Midlands.
(L to R): S. Singleton, D. McKenzie, E.N. Griffin, P.D. Kimber.*

The original farm was named Buffelshoek, abandoned by the Dutch farmer when Britain annexed Natal and allocated it to a Thomas and Ellen Fannin who were from Ireland. The stream on the farm reminded them of their home countryside and named it Dargle after the one in Ireland, and so also the farm. It was subdivided a number of times and in 1883 Neville Griffin bought the portion known as Dargle Valley, which has continued to be owned and farmed by the family, currently William Griffin with wife Caz together with son Michael whose farming is done ethically, ensuring traceable meat, free from added hormones. (www.darglevalley.co.za)

The official record of the Welsh Stud Book reads as follows:

FOREST FIREBOY (857)

W. S. MILLER,

Forest Lodge, Brecon, S. Wales.

Bay. Foaled 1914. Height 11-11½.

Breeder, D. R. Thomas, Tanyrallt Pony Stud, Talybont, Cards.

Sire, Tanyrallt Fireboy (377), bay, 13-2.

Dam, 3554 Berry Hill Smart, bay, 12-3½, by Prospector (6516 H.S.B.).

5542 FOREST LADY STAR

W. S. MILLER,

Forest Lodge, Brecon, S. Wales.

Brown, thin blaze over nose, white near hind fetlock and little
on heel. Foaled 1914. Height 11-2.

*Breeder, Owner.**Sire, Bledfa Shooting Star (73), grey, 11-2½.**Dam, 4891 Forest Merit, chestnut, 11-2, by Forest Mountain Model
(390), dark chestnut, 12-0.**G-dam, 92 Fraser, dark brown, 11-3.*

With the export certificate –

Export Transfers, 1915–16.**STALLIONS.**

From W. S. Miller,
Forest Lodge, Brecon,
S. Wales.

To E. N. Griffin,
Dargle, Natal.

Forest Fireboy (857) ...

Forest John Brown (755) ...

To C. E. Bunn, Peoria,
Illinois, U.S.A.

MARES.

Form W. S. Miller,
Forest Lodge,
S. Wales.

To E. N. Griffin,
Dargle, Natal.

5542 Forest Lady Star ...



Mares of the Forest Stud at Forest Lodge, Brecon, Wales in 1902

Terry Strachan, the current CEO of the Royal Agricultural Society in Pietermaritzburg kindly arranged for one of his staff to search whether Neville showed these ponies at the Royal Show from 1915 to 1919. After a thorough search, he replied that the only mention of EN Griffin in the show catalogues was a donation of £2 to the Society in 1919. He never showed at the Royal. Which leads to the question of why he imported these quality ponies in the first place. The only reason I could think of is for the breeding of Polo ponies. At that stage the height of a Polo pony was limited to 14.0hh and he may have wanted to limit the height of his ponies, and at the same time adding quality and stamina. We will never know.

GK2022

References:

Letters from Norma Griffin, wife of the grandson of Neville Griffin
Terry Strachan, CEO of the Royal Show Society in Pietermaritzburg
Welsh Stud Book

Polo In South Africa: Compiled and Edited by Donald C McKenzie and John R McKenzie. Information and the Dargle team picture