



Loft kings & Street strags

Analysis of the social role of pigeon racing in contemporary English society

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Abstract

Racing pigeons have played a huge role starting back from as far as world war 1, where they saved hundreds of lives and where first captured in the public eye as a iconic hero. They were then adopted as what can be described as the working man's race horse, where over 75,000 people/members between 1970s and 80s kept pigeons as a hobby or pastime.

Pigeons could be told to be the makeup or social classing of a man. Many changes have occurred since in the sport as well as decline, but there is not much research in the broader context of pigeon racing as a whole, and this is where this dissertation may fill some gaps and bring some relevance to the key themes further on.

Pigeons are a day to day occurrence to every ones lives, but for me it doesn't seem to be in the right way. Many people who live in towns or city's see pigeons every day, commonly known as a strags or strays. This is where I feel that the labelling of the "rats with wings" or flying vermin sheds light on peoples lack of education and known history of this bird, but also the modernization of society of today.

Pigeons can be seen as a symbol on every day to day products whether it be a website for a card for example funkypigeon.com, on your soap such as dove or even in cartoons such as wacky racers, so why has peoples relation changed with these birds.

Big names in the pigeon world also seem to appear such as Duncan Ferguson ex Everton player, or even celebrity and sporting greats such as Mike Tyson who has

done documentary's on the birds and tells his story of how he started fighting after somebody killed his pigeons as a young boy.

Is it the modernization of Britain and the more technologically advanced generation of today, that has lost its past times and other means of socialising in the sporting world that once was pigeon racing.

Introduction

This dissertation will analyse and discuss the contemporary issues within pigeon racing in the north west and UK. The question I chose to research is "The role of pigeon racing in contemporary English society?" ,with sub questions I will explore the areas of decline, technology modernization, age transition and also education and popularity on this sport.

The reason I have chosen to research this as there is very limited research around this area of pigeon racing. There are many books on how to fly pigeons and the history of the bird its self, and also scientific research on diseases as well as how the pigeon finds it way home. Research I have conducted myself around previous literature and the use of interviewing has raised my awareness in that nobody has seemed to bother with the area of the sports social role and what and why there has been such a sudden decline.

Issues with this research are that with limited sources to work off, I am taking it upon myself to conducted interviews with top pigeon flyers and also the head of the RPRA.

As a pigeon flyer myself I believe that the modernization of the UK today has played a massive role on the sport but not in the way it should have. With the economy

being low and many people having what could be described as champagne life styles on lambrini wages, I feel that heritage has been lost by those who have chosen a life that doesn't fit our heritage.

Literature review

There is a gap in the published market in the pigeon racing world. Pigeon racing is declining as a sport and also as an important part of the British social landscape.

The literature on pigeon racing has some common themes. These themes can be broken down into a number of categories:

- Medical/scientific
- Commercial
- Historical
- Technical
- Emotional/Social

Looking along the broader aspect lines of the scientific side of pigeons, doctors such as Chitwood (2013) write about articles such as pigeon fever. This kind of article looks at diseases in animals, this case the pigeon and the affects to horses.

However Koch (2011) looks into the pigeons diseases as a whole, and its affects to humans and the paramyxovirus and what can be done to prevent it.

The history of the homing pigeon can be traced back as far as 1793, where pigeon racing had formed its own association in the Columbarian Society Brailsford (1992) suggest that it was formed as a way of exploiting gambling issues, this meant that the pigeons where used as a way of illegal gambling and for those with money to

make more. In its period sweep stakes as high as £40 back then can be found to be a common theme throughout this period.

In the 18th period it seems to be a common theme of publicans and working class having this relation to pub sports and gambling on a whole. The use of animals was a way for many to be involved without having to do any physical activity themselves for example pigeon, horse and dog racing all of great popularity.

Following on the time line June 18th 1815 where Nathan de Rothschild, the London pigeon fancier had equipped himself with homing pigeons for his reports to be delivered, and it is said that he received news of Napoleons defeat at Waterloo 3 days ahead of the general public.

The pigeons ability to home swiftly and be reliable created a boom, and this was recognised as the way to communicate, this meant the pigeon would become a vital piece of kit for those serving in the world wars.

With reference to Naether, C (2010) and Beaumont, M (1999) the relation to the pigeon used in communication terms in the war can be described as " even in 1896 queen Victoria sent messages from her yacht to Portsmouth and over a thousand pigeons where on the roll for the royal navy". Still to this day now we hear of pigeon corpse being found in places as farfetched as chimneys with the messages still attached.

Also there are tales of the pigeons getting back to its homing place to let know of those who fort in the war are safe or have passed. In follow up to this we can look into the royal connection with the racing pigeon, and this is where some slight

relevance can be brought into the role of the pigeon to society, from when it was established as a national governing body of the Royal pigeon racing association.

Pigeons were being raced through our society for fun as they were easy to get hold of, many took a sense of pride in the sport for betting and bragging purposes. The Royal Pigeon Racing Association was formed as a way of expanding common competition getting the sport stamped and popularity increased.

Both the Prince of Wales and Duke of York maintained teams of racing pigeons at Sandringham, and raced them successfully in both local and national events and this continued when the Duke of York became King. The family tradition is maintained by our present monarch, Queen Elizabeth II and the Royal Lofts are now well established at Sandringham under the supervision of a loft manager, where a number of respectable racing performances have been recorded.

Working class played a vital part in the more ever establishing of pigeon racing. Holt (1989) from his book on *sport and the working class in modern Britain*, suggests that with the working class even if we look at somewhere as small as Manchester on the map, had a great support for the sport as with the boom in horse and dog racing it was obviously a lot more expensive to keep a dog or a horse so the racing pigeon was a cheaper working man's way to bet.

Pigeon racing was a male dominated commodity, even retailers such as Lewis's was catering their clothing needs etc. In this time of the industrial era many miners, dockers and labourers also used the pub as a way of socialising but also a route as to race their pigeons and bet on the winners to hopefully bring in some extra income from such as iconic bird of the wars.

This shows that the time of an industrial era where many miners or dockers or labourers could use the pub as a way of socialising but also use his pigeons as a status and a way of betting and trying to bring home some more income from such an iconic bird of the war.

“Today’s pigeon fancier is generally a combination of owner, breeder, trainer, and punter” (Hansell and Hansell, 1988:35). Although pigeon racers can also be called ‘pigeon fanciers’, the racing pigeon world is completely separate to the fancy pigeon world (Mott, 1973; Blechman, 2006; Allen, 2009; Jerolmack, 2013). A fancy pigeon is one of a selected breed chosen for its colour, build and presence whereas the racing pigeon is chosen and bred from the best a flyer can produce or buy.

In follow up to the above on working class sport can be described as a way of classing those involved and what they play/support or follow. For Bourdieu (1978) "sport acts as a kind of badge of social exclusivity and cultural distinctiveness for the dominant classes, it operates as a means of control or containment of the working and popular classes". Bourdieu described sport as a form of exclusion or inclusion and from this we can relate the pigeon racing in the period to the working class, as it wasn't deemed a big enough earner in the betting world. This can all be related back to the concepts of Bourdieu and his interpretation of cultural capital.

Narrowing down to the terms of the role of racing pigeons and whether the sport is declining, I took it up on myself to contact PIPA commonly known as pigeon paradise and also the RPRA.

PIPA was founded in 2000 as a hobby-project where information was collected about everything related to the pigeon sport. A high percentage of the members who help

run this organisation are time served and good winners in the pigeon world, they replied with great help especially the editing officer Mr. N van de berghe :

"Not many young people start with pigeon racing. First, this is because it is a very time-consuming hobby which also costs a lot of money. Secondly, it is not a common hobby among young people whereas in the past an adolescent racing pigeons was not that uncommon. You can compare it to other sports: if you have 5 friends playing football and none racing pigeons, the chance of you ending up playing football is significantly bigger than racing pigeons.

Thirdly, there is a wide range of possibilities of what to do in your spare time. Computer, television, go to the movies, football, badminton, etc. Contrary to the past, it doesn't often happen anymore that a child becomes a fancier because his or her dad is one.

Not many middle-aged people start racing pigeons as well because it is too time-consuming, it costs too much, they have other hobbies or they just don't know the sport even exists.

Many fanciers also quit racing because it is too time-consuming (hard to combine with a family life), it costs too much, the results aren't good (loss of motivation), they do not want to compete with fanciers basketting ten times as much pigeons as they do, the sport has become too professional and less a hobby or they have become too old (which is quite a significant number)."

In terms of the UK head of the RPRA(royal pigeon racing association) Wardrop, S (2013) mentions on their main web page that "It has been estimated that in 1989 the total membership of the RPRA was 60,000 and that this total has since been

declining steadily. Certainly the past eight years have witnessed a drop in membership of approximately 7.5% over the total period. Hopefully, during the next few years, this fall will be arrested and stabilise. Today the Royal Pigeon Racing Association is a thriving business with over thirty employees, an annual turnover of over £1.2 million per year and assets which include office buildings at Cheltenham and Welshpool." <http://www.rpra.org/about-rpra/> last accessed on 20/12/13.

For this part this is only a brief mention of the sport being in decline in the UK, this does not suggest how or why and what is being done to counter this happening. This is a small highlight for me into my research as it has not been done and further more I will be using Wardrop, S as one of my interviewees. I feel the combination of the decline and the role of the pigeon racing in society will combine together to create fresh new research.

Most useful and only article found was done in France which is titled - Pigeon racing clubs in Pas-de-Calais, France, 1870-1914. This article covers where and how pigeons become of popularity in France and shows correlation in terms of who kept them and why.

The writer Baker (2013) mentions that "pigeons racing has had virtually no attention paid to it" in terms of articles and writing, yet with the racing pigeon being such a iconic part of the war why hasn't it been done. His writing on the history could have some significance yet socially for me, it does not explore the reasons why people kept such a iconic bird and why the decline all of a sudden in the sport.

These days the lack in education of the bird and the decline in number has brought the labelling or perception of rats with wings or vermin which can be said for the

birds that ironically can be seen in city squares on television or in everyday life. "The familiar grey pigeons on the pavements...of cities in many parts of the world are nowadays often regarded as pests and a civic nuisance, but their unusual character and their long and interesting history are largely unappreciated" (Hansell, 1998:8).

This is where this dissertation will explore the social role to those still involved in the pigeon community and what they feel it is lacking our country in education of these such iconic, intelligent birds.

Methodology

This dissertation will use the qualitative method of one to one interviews. Interviews are one of the most common ways to collect allot of data at one time, but this isn't just the reason for me using them when researching for my dissertation. Obviously of course I cannot interview a pigeon as this would be impossible so the next closest thing is the people who fly them.

Of these interviews they will be informal and one to one so that the interviewees, which have been carefully chose can tell their story. Their answer can be open to go into as much detail as they like on their own experiences in the sport, and hopefully help me gain research material when it comes to my question of "the role of pigeon racing in contemporary English society?".

Silverman (2009) "Instead of looking, listening and reading, the majority of contemporary qualitative researchers prefer to select a small group of individuals to interview or to place in focus groups. In this sense, by assembling a specific research sample, linked only by the fact that they have been selected to answer a

pre-determined research question, such researchers prefer to 'manufacture' their data rather than to 'find' it in the 'field'".

Warren(1998) "qualitative interviews the interviewees are given space to expand their answers and accounts of their experiences and feelings. Moreover, their answers are not pre-categorised in the interview schedule.

Qualitative interviews are often used in an exploratory manner which seeks to investigate the subjective interpretations of social phenomena. They do not necessarily presume that most of the topics of interest are known in advance.

The aim is often interpretation and understanding of how and why, not 'fact-finding' or getting answers to questions of how much or how many".

If I were to use questionnaires I feel that I could pre determine the questions to suit my answers and not allow those who I have chosen to interview, who have treble the amount of experience in pigeon racing on me to tell their view and give insight into changes they have seen or felt over the years.

Interviewees

I selected and got in contact with 6 males who are aged over 45 years of age and have been flying pigeons for more than 30 years each. The reason for me picking these candidates is that these are the people who have seen the changes and modernization of the sport and would be in best interest to answer my questions.

Most importantly I contacted the queen as she has the royal connection and keeps pigeons herself. In response to my letter I received back that the queen would not be able for interview, so the letter put me in contact with the head of the royal pigeon racing association Mr Stewart wardrop, where my research would begin.

By starting at the top with the head of the association and also interviewing others of working class will allow me to broaden my knowledge, but also the answer may show positive or negative correlation in terms of same or different answers. Also I worked out that pigeon racing is a very highly male dominated sport, and with previous text suggesting that it was northern working class that flew pigeons in the time of its boom period it tied in fine with my geographical location its self.

After conducting 3 good successive interviews, 2 of which were with top pigeon flyers and the other with the head of the royal pigeon racing association I had 3 left which unfortunately didn't get conducted. One of the males I had made contact with had taken a 2 week holiday, and one was in hospital which would have left me only a week to complete the rest of the dissertation, with their answers provided so I could not go ahead with those 2.

The third candidate did not get back in contact after showing great interest in wanting to help me so this was a bit of a blow towards the research but the other 3 interviews that did get taken out where of great relevance and quality. Below is a table of the 3 interviewees that took part.

Name	Age	Years racing
Mr Stewart Wardrop	53	32
Mr Thomas Bressnehan	52	42
Mr Phillip Powell	67	50

Data analysis

Upon conducting these interviews I had to go through the process of transcribing these, and replaying and listening to the information provided to consume some answers that I could categorise into key themes. With the use of transcribing I could pick out key themes through the long hours typing, which brought some relevance and inspiration from the back ground reading I had done in the literature review above. By allowing for the long hours I could bring relevance not only to the answers from the questions I had, but also understand the interviewees story they were telling me, relating to the aspects of the emotional and extrinsic factors.

Also with the use of web pages, magazines and reports I could create a triangulation affect when it come to getting some answers and bringing relevance to know and then in the time line period.

Throughout the data analysis of the 3 interviews, I have found 6 common themes that bring relevance to the social role of pigeon racing. Also factors such as modernization and cost contribute towards the sports changes. Below starting with the working class allows me to start answering the role of pigeon racing, and what changes are ongoing or going to have in the future.

Working class and pigeon racings social aspects

There are currently 1169 affiliated pigeon clubs with in the RPRA across the UK. To bring some insightful relevance in terms of the working class, starting with just the names of the clubs and where they are located on the liberation maps, can allow the starting points on the topic of working class. Many of the clubs situated on the

liberation maps show that they are in the geographical area where it is very industrialised and very much around the working class places.

Johnes (2007)"Pigeons have sat alongside flat caps and whippets as archetypal signifiers of the northern working-class male. In reality, the pastime's social and geographic base were much wider but pigeon racing was nonetheless an important component of male working-class culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's, particularly in the industrial districts of south Wales, central Scotland and the north of England. Here the wooden pigeon lofts, often made from waste timber and painted brightly to attract the birds, formed a distinctive feature of the landscape. Yet despite pigeon racing's popularity, historians have, by and large, overlooked the activity. This represents a missed opportunity: pigeon racing was intertwined with masculinity, voluntary association and material constraints, themes that are central to the history of working-class culture".

From my 3 interviewees all 3 gave the same answer as to where the sport would be classed best to, below is what Mr. Powell, Wardrop and Bressnehan said.

Mr Wardrop: yes dad was a tool maker because back in the mid 18 hundreds pigeon racing was a sport of the gents of the wealthy as moving pigeons long distances cost allot of money. It was only with the revolution with the advent of steams trains that it became a sport of the masses.

Mr Wardrop: but it is seen as a traditional working class sport make no hog beds about it the major industrialised areas are keeping this going yano the traditional working class areas. But the biggest transformation of the sport was with the introduction of the rail road's and that saw it grow.

P. Powell – When I first started racing pigeons, there was a lot of minors who had pigeons. A lot of them in my club were minors.

T. Bressnehan - it used to be a working man's sport

All 3 of the above mention this working class era and how the rail road's and industrial revolution played a key part in converting a gentleman's sport into the working class. Although they mention working class there still has this tie relation to the cost of the sport going up which will be my next chapter.

Clubs such as my own are called Whiston labour club and many others across the map are ex service men's clubs bringing in this whole ideology attached to the sport that it is of the masculine, male, working class sport.

Many of the pigeon clubs also are a part of a pub or on the same grounds as one keeping the heritage of where the sport started before clocks where involved. Before clocks where involved those who raced pigeons would wait for their bird to come back from a race, then it was first man back to the pub with his bird to determine the winner.

In agreement with the pub being the social gathering of the pigeon flyers Richard Holt brings some relevance to how it was when mining was such a big commodity, and how men used the pigeons as a way of escaping or forgetting about being down dark pits for so long, and this is where we can highlight a change to the present day as the mining is done by machine not man mostly anymore.

Holt (1989)"miners were the most enthusiastic pigeon fanciers in Britain where the sport was enormously popular. Often living in industrial villages close to a relation of older sporting tradition, cooped up for long periods in dark cramped coal seams,

miners seem to have had a particular feeling for the natural warmth and graceful speed of dogs and birds. The breeding of these birds as message carriers together with the spread of the rail network meant that pigeons could be raced either by individuals over long distances. Pigeon racing offered a mixture of attractions; the skill of the individual fancier both rewarded by winning club trophies and prizes and bets. The trip down the club usually the back room of a local pub for the synchronizing of clocks, the ringing and the filling in of forms was a social event."

For many in the 1970s-80s, the pigeon club was a second home, the social gathering to talk about a passion you had with the mixture of alcohol fuelled conversations about who was top of the club and the bragging rights to the trophies and prizes available to win is only a small part of the racing pigeons role to man. If we interoperate long hard days working with a Friday night pub trip with the pigeons, we can bring some significance as to why the birds where so popular.

Many men were seen as the worker and that the wife of the house would look after the house and the children etc so by all working class men using the public house as a gathering the pigeons would not only be a good excuse for a piss up but the norm in the day of its boom.

From the above about the socialization aspect of pigeon racing and its relation to the pub 2 out of my 3 interviewees mention about its relevance and what it used to be like compared to know.

T .Bressnehan - it is the best club yano I ended up being sectary of the club and we used to have a crack on a Friday night all go home get up Saturday and you would be up and out cleaning your pigeon shed out

Mr Wardrop: I can always remember down the comrades club with me dad and they would do a little show so me and my brother would go down and help set up the tables and put the pens on top and put the birds in and I always remember my first taste of a pint of beer was when I was 8 or 9 and one of the pigeon fanciers let me have a swig of his pint, so there's that social aspect there's always been the marking night in the pigeon club of a Friday we used to go with dad and that kept us out of mums hair and dad socialised with his mates and we used to go to mess about.

From the above the 2 interviewees they describe it as the Friday night crack and for 1 of them it was their first taste of beer. If we relate this to today first of all it would be frowned upon if not worse to give a child of 9 a swig of beer, yet as part of the club it wasn't seen or even in that time era noticed as anything bad.

The social aspect in relation to the pub today is that it is uncommon of a Friday night to hear of the pigeon clubs, and also with the financial state of the country and the prices of beer rising it brings a insight as to why pubs are closing and obviously cost goes up many people cannot afford to go out like they used to, the average price now of a pint of lager in great Britain for instance is £3 clearly which would affect the bank balance if you where to go out every Friday. This now follows on to my next chapter of cost.

Costs in pigeon racing

Over many years like everything costs have raised whether it be essentials or even informal extras. Throughout pigeon racing many of things have raised, starting on my first point of this chapter which is corn. Corn is vital to feed your pigeons all year round and if we look at how corn has increased we see that there are many more

types and brands of corn today that you can fly/race your pigeons on. Many factors around pigeons racing have raised but below are 2 comments from 2 of my interviewees about the mention of cost to corn alone.

Mr Bressnehan mentions that "well for a kick off the errr the way the food has gone up now when I first started it was 3 quid for 25 kilos now ya talking 15 pound a bag "

"that's a hard one that as everything is just expensive there not going to subsidise things are they so yano even the rpra goes up every year the member ships go up the federation fee goes up then your club might add money on so it's just going up and up and up"

Mr. Powell says that "I believe I need to cut down when it comes to purchasing pigeons, the prices of corn nowadays is on the rise. Years ago there wasn't all the foreign corn, the Belgium corn, the verserlargers and that – there was just one specific corn to purchase and that was all we had. Unless you where lucky enough to work on the docks and get a bag of maize".

Interpreting this into pigeon racing terms we can see that with just the price of corn that has risen it is going to affect factors such as how many birds you can keep. The more birds you keep to race, gives you a greater opportunity in terms of winning the race, but the knock on affect is that it is more mouths to feed. On average if you keep around 20 pigeons a bag of average corn that is £10 may only last you 2 and a half weeks. Over a year alone the pigeons may cost up to between £480 onwards just to keep and that is before you vaccinate or treat them to any other kinds of nutrients or treatments along the way.

Cost is a massive factor these days in this sport and if we look at the average age of a pigeon flyer in the UK, the head of the RPRA Mr Wardrop says "This is the decline the only reason pigeon racing is declining its about 5% a year and its very, very steady it's been going on since the 80s and the problem is if you, plot white male Anglo Saxon life expectancy I think is average 81 I think and you plot are average age of 70 for the racers".

Straight away from his comment we see that if a average pigeon racer is 70 years of age and life expectancy is 81, does this mean in 11 years or so from now, pigeon racing will be completely forgot about.

In agreement to this also, 70 years of age can be classed as a pensioner, and the average state pension is £110.15 per week, how could somebody of that age on that money per week run a pigeon loft and pay not just the food for the birds of on average £480 per year, but sending the birds to the race which is average 50p per bird, and then obviously transport and the maintenance of the loft and the pigeon clocks and the club membership and region fees.

In terms of the pigeon lofts where you house the birds, when asked about cost from my question below Mr Bressnehan comments on cost being a big factor, and says that- " Me - when we look at pigeon racing as a working class sport then how much you say you have spent if you don't mind me asking obviously looking at your lofts and that

T .Bressnehan - well I'd hate to think yano the shed in me back there cost me £4000 and then like 40 years of corn, imagine it I used to go through 6 bags of corn a week when I had allot of pigeons now I've cut right down and don't

keep as many to cut the cost down because of the price of corn you just can't afford it"

Throughout today pigeon racing housing for the birds has also changed, many small home built lofts scattered the UK's landscape.

Today pigeon lofts are becoming bigger better and more technologically advanced. Lofts today can range from £600 for the basics up to a whopping £8000 where the birds have all their needs covered even with heating and lighting.

On a whole pigeon racing is very expensive, and unless a initiative is brought in to reduce the costs I think this will also be a deterrent for new members and people keeping the sport going but also young people getting into the sport which brings the next key theme.

Young people in pigeon racing

From my own experience racing pigeons over the past 4 years, my club suggest that I am the youngest flyer at the age of 21 for the past 8 years. Questions have got to be asked as to why young people are not getting into the sport. Upon conducting my 3 interviews, I made a point of asking why the sport is not only declining, but why young people are not getting involved when the average age of a flyer is 70 years of age. Below are my 3 interviewees comments.

Mr Wardrop: owww defiantly when I was growing up in the 70s obviously I grew up around pigeons but if I wanted to go do something I went up the fields climbing trees and stuff like that, my kids don't do that they watch videos play video games, all that stuff

Me: technology is a big part of today

Mr Wardrop: you know some times I go home and I've got eldest son ,
daughter and youngest all doing this (acting out typing on their phones)

T .Bressnehan - because there's no kids involved these young kids now don't
want to come home and start cleaning sheds out they want to come home
and start pressing buttons on a computer lap top phones whatever, they don't
want to go outside to the pigeons in the cold etc as it's a everyday occurrence
and kids don't want to do that no more they wana just come home they dont
want to go out scrapping sheds ad cleaning up, up after the pigeons they just
wana mess around with buttons

"for me I don't really likes its one where the kids come home they have been
to school all day and no ones bringing them into it like if a young kid come to
me and asked me for some pigeons not a problem but it doesn't happen"

P. Powell - well if you go to Blackpool every year it doesn't seem to be
declining like but erm it is yer, theirs no youngsters coming into the sport but
you do see them yano I mean theirs one lad just joined are club yourself yano
joined the last couple of seasons, erm they seem to come into it then drop out
or their interested in it when there fathers and that and then they drop out and
seem to come back when they settle down and get married and things like
that allot take the sport up again then

To bring relevance to the 3 interviewees comments above there is defiantly this
socially arrogance, stigma related to young people today with their technology. All 3
suggest that young people are not coming into the sport as the modernization of the

children today, are more interested in video games phones etc. With every sport modernization of sport plays a key factor when keeping numbers but many other sports have done so.

Upon analysing these comments to suggest that back in the 70s on wards there was no money or technology to waste time with or on, the pigeon was a easy animal to get hold of and seemed the norm and popular at the time.

In contrast the modernization comment Mr Wardrop suggest that

"yes and that's where unfortunately the sport sat back on its morals and we've missed two complete generations that's 50 years worth and loosing those two generations is why the sport is rushing towards a demographic time bomb".

Like with any organisation I feel that when times are good, many areas such as promotion and initiatives for keeping things going for the future, are swept under the carpet. With Mr Wardrop's comment it can bring light into the fact that those born in the late 80s early 90s where not part of the pigeon boom and if the decline keeps falling at a rate of 5% then where will pigeon racing end up. With the labelling of young children being to modernized with technology this could play a vital role in saving the sport.

What can be done?

Both Mr Bressnehan and Powell suggest that going into schools is the best way of planting the seed in young people's head to start racing

" I was reading that homing world and there's a few people going into schools and doing little shows and that what we need to do get a couple of pigeons and go to the schools to show them what its about, bring some babies with

them even if its just a few fan tails once they've got that instinct with the fan tails or the tipplers then you can get rid of them and get racing pigeons where you see them go around and race and people will help you out I've helped people out where I've gave them clocks and baskets and they haven't even bothered racing".

P. Powell - "I think like we could should get more involved in schools yano I mean I'd love to go to my grandsons my grandsons been interested in them and that, erm I've took him out to the loft as soon as I could like and that and erm, but I would love to like, not just myself and maybe a couple of others go to his school and put a show on. yano just if you got one kid out of ten that is interested yano I think it would make a difference like but even just to make kids aware of racing pigeons and what they actually did like for us in the war and things like that, would be erm a big help yano what I mean so"

Recently Mr Wardrop has started doing talks around pigeons in the war where he has featured on Sunday brunch, the Alan Titmarsh show and others televised shows to follow. Problems I feel restricting the schools Idea is once again cost but also the calendar month and teachers. If you do a show on pigeons and what they do and are about then you are only scratching the surface of what the sport is about.

If pigeon racing was to receive big investment I feel by them setting up small lofts in school could give children a great insight into the sport but also allow them to benefit from the fact that the parents don't have to have a pigeon loft in the garden and that over summer they could visit the school of a Saturday to wait and be involved in the pigeons race day. This could then have the knock on affect of, local pigeon flyers being involved and a new school based competition be put into place.

Following on from children all 3 interviews high light a transition in the sport which will tie in to this chapter above.

Transition

Throughout conducting my interviews each interviewee, highlights a common theme of transition throughout the life of a pigeon flyer. It is suggested that when you are young you fly the pigeons as a hobby, whether it be with a family member or friends and once you make a career change or a life change such as marriage, or moving out, you leave the pigeon racing until you are secure. This also suggest that pigeon racing once "in your blood" will always play a life factor no matter what. Below are the comments of my 3 interviewees;

T .Bressnehan - ill never give it up once its in your blood you will never give them up you will always keep them you can pack up then once you see someone else's pigeons you will go home and start up again

S .Wardrop - "Even though I left home, he flew with the BBC and me and my wife, we used to go to the pigeon functions and stuff if Dad went to pick a cup up, we used to go too. Even though had no pigeons of my own then, because I moved away I was still interest and every time I went to see Dad I was still interested. And then when I started this job three years ago, my kids were old enough but wasn't interested, even though my little one has a slight interest because of his relationship with Granddad. Whenever we've gone to visit granddad, my little lad Sam has always been able to go with my Dad up to the loft and so on, so when I said that my Dad and about me and my youngest son flying was just young birds, Dad has created us a little loft. Its only small,

nothing big or exotic, and he bred us nineteen youngens and we trained them".

P.Powell - "erm they seem to come into it then drop out or their interested in it when there fathers and that and then they drop out and seem to come back when they settle down and get married and things like that allot take the sport up again then"

All 3 candidates show relation to this transition or period of people leaving the sport whether it be social, life events or even a bad racing season.

All 3 agree that through out there racing carers, there has been good and bad days and that's why when you fly the pigeons it mostly patience.

A example of a life transition could be as simple as moving house, as the pigeons are trained to the loft they were raised in, so a new house means moving your pigeons using many for stock which means they will not race again or going through the long hassle or breaking them out to a new loft.

Although transitions takes place family, relations play a big part in interpreting this hooked experience with racing pigeons. Beedie (2008)With in the family, various members can recount sporting events whose memory becomes part of the shared identity of the family .in this way, many families develop a long lasting relationship with one sport.

Technology and modernization

Tying In with the above many believe that technology will take over this sport. Online betting companies and technological wizards, are working on a way to produce a live GPS tracking race programme, which will allow you to log online and follow your birds every flap of the way.

The BBC documented a short film at the Blackpool show (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21140526>) that suggest that with technology it will bring in young people, but allow a boom from betting companies to bring a new cheaper way of betting in the pigeon racing world.

Many would contradict and worry about tradition, but will tradition have to be lost to save the sport. From my interviews I asked about the ETS (electronic timing system), and whether they agreed with it being in place below are the answers given 1 against from Mr Bressnehan, 1 for from Mr Wardrop;

T .Bressnehan - "when there was the 30-40 members it was a well better time and affordable now there doing away with clocks and bringing in this new ETS system and there doing away with all kinds and it's just getting more expensive, so when the people go in know and have a drink in the club they can't do that no more because the beers obviously too expensive and pigeons are too expensive

T .Bressnehan - its taking away all the tradition there's no tradition with the ETS the pigeon comes back and you don't even have to be In the house there's no attention to the pigeon there

T .Bressnehan - yeah get rid of the ETS as no young kid is going to come in where all these fellas have got ETS as the kid s going to have no chance of winning. Bring back the clocks and get rid of the ETS that's what I say "

"Mr Wardrop: yes you know already there at a stage now where this ETS will send you a text if you are out to say your pigeon is home you know this is already available and then the next stage hopefully will be a automation of the club results.

Mr Wardrop: erm my dad, first time I started this job I said what about flying ETS because I'm going to and he said no chance and I said well it will suit me and Sam as I'm working allot and he has his football so at least we know they would be being recorded so what I done was borrowed a ETS and did a few trials and my dad was sectary of his club so had to get up to date with this timing system, he was making a balls up of it when he was trying to use it so I said I would borrow one and trial it and now he's been well converted the grumpy old get"

Through listening and examining Mr Bressnehans body language the sense of heritage has played a key part in pigeon racing for him, especially with the proudest part most probably the starting and following in his father's footsteps.

I suppose the suggestion that keeping it old fashioned would give children a chance to relive that Saturday morning race day feeling, as every flyer remembers there first race and buzz of clocking in a pigeon. Many would agree clocking your first pigeon is as good as winning your first race.

On the other hand Mr Wardrop has converted his father who is a experienced and highly ranked pigeon racer, and that technology now with the introduction of the ETS gives you flexibility and the option to never miss a bird being clocked.

I agree with the ETS myself also in terms of at the elder age of 70, many have difficulties with health for example arthritis, when the bird comes back from a race the chip in its leg registers with the computer board, as it goes in the shed/loft so, there is no need to bend down pick the bird up, and take the band of to clock it in as saving seconds can be vital in 1st and 2nd place.

If pigeon racing is to move onto the live GPS tracking and work alongside betting companies this will follow pursuit of the dog racing world. This means that the sport would have more money to regulate problems such as animal doping and also losses of pigeons around the UK.

During the interview with Mr Wardrop suggested that -

"yes its transformed grey hound racing that was on its back side and was going to disappear and with the advent of the betting its became much more professional controlled by a single body they spend 8 million on doping controls things like this and we've met with the greyhound board, pigeon racing is total opposite year before last we did a total of 7 and this can be only described s pathetic, last year we done 47 which is a step in the right direction but the only way to test properly is via dropping pigeon poo, bloods we can't do but we collect the poo and send it to south Africa as they are head and shoulders ahead and most experienced. We had one last year done for caffeine but we couldn't prove it was deliberate".

Many would argue about heritage and I would respond that this is the generation before the 80s, who have seen and been a part of the good old days where it was of the masses. However if betting levy's of money and live tracking can regulate and produce a better sport, then this is where I feel those flying old fashioned have to give some leeway and try the contemporary way.

Conclusion

As a pigeon flyer myself I feel that coming into the sport 4 - 5 years ago, has given me the chance to be in the right time period where I can see change happening. Although I use a standard clock myself I do agree with the more technological advancements trying to come into place.

I feel this would defiantly allow the sport to boom to what it was once at, but on the other hand, coming from a working class background myself the cost would be too much for me to be buying a ETS and try run a loft of 20 pigeons plus.

If the sport is to keep up with demand of other foreign countries such as Belgium or South Africa where they have million dollar races. I feel that the sport does need this cash injection not just to promote the sport but to give back to those racing.

Cheaper subscriptions and timing systems could be used as a way of getting the sport back to its peak. Even renting timing systems could be a more cost effective way to allow people a chance as there is always the drawback of leaving the sport.

In terms of children and getting them involved not every child looks after one pet and keeps it for life as we see many parents get the burden of the pet so I feel not only children but males and female should also get involved and race as a family partnership like it used to be.

Every pigeon flyer you speak to will always have a story to tell whether it be about winning or something humorous that has happened through out there racing career.

I feel the time and effort the people put in should be rewarded as in me conducting the interviews, gave not just a sense of pride but also the look of joy on some of their faces, to think that a young male is showing a interest and they are getting to show their importance and say there piece.

Throughout this dissertation the biggest problem with it is that there are many books and articles about how to fly pigeons or the medical side of curing viruses etc. There is very limited literature that suggest any relevance to the social role of pigeon racing and its decline and this is where I believe it will be a gap filled soon once pigeon racing moves on to the next advancement.

Limitations and recommendations for research

The biggest limitation for this research and most obvious is that you cannot interview a pigeon. Although I conducted 3 interviews and transcribed them I feel that, the time frame for this dissertation was short, compared to the amount of time that could be spent doing interviews and transcribing them.

Recommendations for the research would be to spend around 12 months just interviewing and transcribing different well experienced flyers from around the UK, and then do the same with young children and their thoughts or views if any on pigeons racing. By doing this I feel you could bring some more relevance to this piece and broaden it out, but also by interviewing young people we could explain this lost generation or transition pigeon racing has lost from when it was at its peak in the

70s-80s. With both of these done I feel this then leaves a gap for a comparison, to be wrote and reflected from the findings of old vs young.

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Appendices

Head of the RPRA Mr S.Wardrop held in Cheltenham at the main pigeon governing bodies site.

Me: First of all, thank you for participating today, its 1:05pm and its the 6th of March. Just to get the ball rolling, where did pigeon racing start for you then?

Mr Wardrop: Well, my dad starting pigeon racing when he lived in Scotland, he moved down to Glostershire in 1955 and he started a loft up with his brothers. I came along in 1961 and I can remember pigeons being in the family all the way through growing up. When I was about eight or nine, my first recollection of tasting a pint of beer was down the pigeon club with dad, the pigeon fanciers would let me swig their pints of beer in the Comrades Club. In my teenage years, about twelve or thirteen, I used to earn pocket money by scraping out the loft, helping Dad and stuff like that. I also remember at the age of fourteen, being trusted with looking after the pigeons, on the race day, Dad had to pop out and take mum somewhere, which he wasn't very happy about. However, me and younger brother started playing football and he said has anything come and we said 'No, Dad, no, Dad!' he went up in the loft and two birds where there.

Me: Obviously you weren't in the best of book that weekend then!

Mr Wardrop: Obviously to say there was trouble! But then I started to take an interest in racing pigeons up to about seventeen, eighteen then other things came along that took my interest once I lift home my interest declined. I've always been interested in pigeons, Dad was a good long distance flyer, he had some good Barcelona results and probably around the late eighties when there were probably some really big returns and really tough races and he won various kinds of federation prizes, although his disadvantage in the South West, he had seventh or eighths in the Barcelona races and stuff. Even though I left home, he flew with the BBC and me and my wife, we used to go to the pigeon functions and stuff if Dad went to pick a cup up, we used to go too. Even though had no pigeons of my own then, because I moved away I was still interest and every time I went to see Dad I was still interested. And then when I started this job three years ago, my kids were old enough but wasn't interested, even though my little one has a slight interest because of his relationship with Granddad. Whenever we've gone to visit granddad, my little lad Sam has always been able to go with my Dad up to the loft and so on, so when I said that my Dad and about me and my youngest son flying was just young birds, Dad has created us a little loft. Its only small, nothing big or exotic, and he bred us nineteen youngens and we trained them. Dad also did a bit of training and I took them in the morning, as well as my little lad a six o'clock in the morning before he went to school and all this sort of stuff.; and we trained the and raced them. The beauty about doing the young birds is apart from a couple of weeks of the races season, the rest fall in the school holidays which is brilliant.

Me: A nice transition

Mr Wardrop: It's brilliant! Then on the marking night, which is a Friday, my Dad would pick my lad up, go and sort the pigeon, put them in their baskets, Id meet them up the club. And on a Saturday, which is the race day, my little one plays football to a good standard, so when he's finished we would go along and sit with granddad until the pigeons come home and then go the club and wait for the results. The beauty of having a loft at das is, that he looks after their security and well-being, as I can't do it as I'm running a full time bloody job and I've always got a family, with kids and my missus wants to go shopping and stuff; so we've got the best of both worlds, my little ones interested, I've got an interest and we've got a pigeon fancier running our loft.

Me: You say you took up your role three years ago, can you briefly explain what your role is within RPRA?

Mr Wardrop: My role is the general manager of the RPRA. We have 25000 members and we are structured into thirteen regions and over two-thousand clubs. The RPRA effectively is one of the five UK pigeon unions, the other ones being Northern England Homing Union, North West Homing Union, Welsh Homing Union, Scottish Homing Union and the Irish Homing Union; and we basically a member owned association, looking after promotion, development and regulation of pigeon racing. We are by far the biggest and the head quarter here at the Readings, we have staff of sixteen and the primary function we perform is the registration of pigeon rings, so we buy and sell pigeon rings, we keep a record so we know who owns each pigeon; we also have team during the racing season who take calls from fanciers and members of the public with regards to repatriating strays, which is very important to our members. It's a very important animal welfare we provide. We also manage transfer of pigeons, so if a fancier sells or gives a pigeon to another fancier, we arrange all the transfers'. We keep all the membership, secretary and club details. We arrange partnerships and sell various products ranging from rubber rings, basket seals and polo shirts. We also administer show of the year and the staff administer and provide the details of the venue for the Blackpool show. Other we do is promoting and advising members and produce the rule books, ring lists and the whole series of leaflets which I'll give you before you go. We maintain the RPRA website, which over the last two years has been transformed from useless and rubbish into an actual working tool and the other large thing is promote the sport in general through press activity, information for journalists, attending TV releases which I starred on the Alan Titmarsh Show last week, and two weeks before I was on Sunday Brunch (BBC) We were also gifted an archive by a gentleman called Mike Lieutenant Dan, of which part of it is on loan but the rest is permanent which we are going to digitalise and produce a documentary of it together. So basically we are the focal centre for anything pigeon racing based from rules or member ship enquiries .

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: we even produce a club secretaries guide which is advice and guidance on how clubs are set up, we also administer all of the finance for the organization we have a magazine called the British homing world which is based up in Shrewsbury staff of 16 over there produce that weekly of just over 20,000 copies. In the last two weeks we have a online version which we hope to sell overseas and so on, erm , the turnover is about a million pounds a year and this subsidizes all things around are member ship activates. It is only a small profit organization as it isn't based for profit.

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: we organise the one loft race based in dukes bury

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: we have a future of sports committee which is tasked to drive the future development of the sport that's it so yes it's a small team of 16 which I will take you around later we have a small team as well for member ship support which do all the transfer and rings we have racing support department which look after all the site bookings, ferry bookings so all of the liberation stuff for continental racing.

Loft locations distances also involved in that and then there's me general manager organizing 32 people over two sites

Me: excellent in terms of before you mentioned about erm your father being the seed of the plant for getting you into pigeon racing allot of people who kept pigeons in his day where miners or working class

Mr Wardrop: yes dad was a tool maker because back in the mid 18 hundreds pigeon racing was a sport of the gents of the wealthy as moving pigeons long distances cost allot of money. It was only with the revolution with the advent of steams trains that it became a sport of the masses.

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: but it is seen as a traditional working class sport make no hog beds about it the major industrialised areas are keeping this going yano the traditional working class areas. But the biggest transformation of the sport was with the introduction of the rail road's and that saw it grow. Although there's still the queen she keeps pigeons down at sandgringham and there's still some very wealthy people in pigeon racing. In the 1970s - 1980s when pigeon racing in the UK was at its peak there was probably about 70,000 fanciers in the UK

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: yano if we were in the 60s and 70s now Wayne Rooney and Michael own and people like that wouldn't have race horses they would have the pigeons a member of ours jerry Francis England captain from the 1980s,

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: he still actively flies pigeons and he's a member of the rpra.

Me: I know of dunken Ferguson

Mr Wardrop: yes he's another one yes yano footballers of their day who kept pigeons where not earning anything like they are now but there leisure time was racing the pigeons so that's a significant change of what's gone on.

Me: what would say Is the subject to the decline obviously there is allot of pensioners in the sport

Mr Wardrop: yer ok the main reason and this is my personal view the main reason for the decline is that during the boom times the 70s and 80s the sport sat on its hands and rested on its morels and basically thought it's a big sport and its always going to be here, and it did nothing in the good times to promote activities and effectively has missed I'd say 2 generations average age of a pigeon fancier in the UK now is 70

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: average age of somebody coming in id say is probably late teenagers something like that and that's 2 whole generations missed the baby boomers from the late 60s and the sport just sat back for too long came out of the public eye and was just forgotten. Yano if you speak to people today they say like Trafalgar square, dirty animals, stuff like that you know. If you talk to somebody about pigeons in the 70s and 80s the chances are they would know about or mention racing pigeons. If you go to people in the street and talk about racing pigeons they haven't got a clue.

Me: do you think that is education then or the technology advancement we have today.

Mr Wardrop: owww defiantly when I was growing up in the 70s obviously I grew up around pigeons but if I wanted to go do something I went up the fields climbing trees and stuff like that, my kids don't do that they watch videos play video games, all that stuff

Me: technology is a big part of today

Mr Wardrop: you know some times I go home and I've got eldest son , daughter and youngest all doing this

Me: obviously on their phones

Mr Wardrop: yes and that's where unfortunately the sport sat back on its morals and we've missed two complete generations that's 50 years worth and loosing those two generations is why the sport is rushing towards a demographic time bomb. This is the decline the only reason pigeon racing is declining its about 5% a year and its very very steady it's been going on since the 80s and the problem is if you plot white male Anglo Saxon life expectancy I think is average 81 I think and you plot are average age of 70 the racers

Me: obviously only a 10 year gap which is a short space of time for the sport

Mr Wardrop: obviously you plot that you literally fall off a cliff do you get are magazine at all

Me: sometimes I do yes

Mr Wardrop: once again you open it its same old members etc where as if it was new members you know across the front. A problem is, is that more are going out than coming in I suppose.

Now there are some initiatives the midland national club have a initiative called flying back to nature which is a primary school initiative that we are going to be supporting this summer the rpra last year we contacted 100 local schools and they followed the yearling race, which worked well as it was in the school calendar its no good trying to follow young bird racing as there all on holiday. Last year we did a dozen school talks you know took some pigeons along let the children hold them and stuff and that genuinely does get new members.

Me: so that's like you know plants the seed for them

Mr Wardrop: when you go in teachers typically at a primary school are late 20s to early 40s and they understand nothing as they are that missed generation they know nothing about them

Me: I feel allot of it is labelling you know I mention it in university and its common to hear the term flying rats

Mr Wardrop: yes flying rats flat caps and whippets

Me: there lacking in education or if they don't see it on the television allot of people relate it to emerdale

Mr Wardrop: yep that's it jack duck worth and that's the problem we have is that missed generation

Me: in terms of the missed generation and the pigeon as well if people knew their history it was such a iconic bird for the war and they saved so many lives

Mr Wardrop: thankfully we've started to show people and try to use the medals these are the war medals that were honoured to those pigeons

Me: from the war its self

Mr Wardrop: yes

Me: all beautiful medals

Mr Wardrop : this one's mercury and we the rpra own 5

Me: there was about 30 awarded

Mr Wardrop: yes 32 for pigeons and we've got 5 of them today wonderful they are

Me: obviously sitting here holding them as well it's a piece of history which people relate to the strags on the street 1945 April Dutch coast

Mr Wardrop: yep that's it Dutch coast saved the whole crew from a Lancaster bomber

Me: like you say it's that lost generation that plays such a big part now in not knowing about this side to the racing pigeons

Mr Wardrop: yes like this one here mercury saved hundreds of lives he was a very special pigeon, he had already done numerous missions and he was one of 12 that was selected to go across the Danish resistance all 12 were in fact released with the same message saying there was German shipping coming out into Denmark and this meant they could divert a convoy away from being attacked so it saved thousands of tons of ship and hundreds of lives all from this one pigeon from the 12 that made it back.

Me: fascinating stuff as well

Mr Wardrop: yes but all those need to be displayed and stuff we did a display at Blackpool, I'll show you the bag I took and all of these posters that you can access on our website and stuff

Me: excellent yes

Mr Wardrop: these are just bits and pieces I'll show you with regards to the history and stuff

Me: the pigeon parachute

Mr Wardrop: this is the one that gets the interest the pigeon parachute and this year on the event about the war and stuff we have only just started kind of saying yes to doing the talks and already all those pieces of paper behind you are bookings

Me: obviously a busy man then

Mr Wardrop: yes can't cope but here's some other stuff you may like to see we were doing some digging around before we done Sunday brunch and we found stuff in the archive which is this a amazing document dated April 1919 the royal air force which before the RAF and this is a list of all the pigeons that served for them. This comment here pigeon let go through C plane with message and saved pilot. Baring in mind this is the 1st world war and these planes were like sack and string

Me: yes

Mr Wardrop: carrying the pigeon in this style of box as there were no radios at all pages and pages of these pigeons saving lives from air craft's. And where hoping to get all these documents re copied

Me: this could be my claim to fame as this is a new piece of the jig saw in the history then

Mr Wardrop: yes course here's another one the secret services and a list of their pigeons they used and where they went and came back to so like the SAS of pigeons, and we are just scratching the surface of what Dan Humphries has left us. Here are some call up papers for pigeons 1940 and what happens is pigeon fanciers would ring to say they had their birds ready and they would be sent various places . the police didn't know allot so you had to have a license to keep them.

Me: so they saved life's and stop crime then

Mr Wardrop: oww yes absolutely brilliant stuff they even had ration cards for pigeons and you had instructions on had to wrap a pigeon up to put in a parachute

Me: amazing stuff

Mr Wardrop: you had to keep your license as well so you couldn't be a German and send info back through pigeons then you know we have tons of records like this.

Me: all this in such a small space of time then yes and your bag is a pigeon on the go talk

Mr Wardrop: yes this box would carry 4 pigeons if you where on a bomber plane and you had a map book and leg carriers for information the navigator had to look after all these

Me: in terms of when you look now then with technology and we have ETS systems would you say that they are a benefit to the sport or a loss off the heritage what's your personal view I knew I'd have to ask something a little more tricky?

Mr Wardrop: erm my dad, first time I started this job I said what about flying ETS because I'm going to and he said no chance and I said well it will suit me and Sam as I'm working allot and he has his football so at least we know they would be being recorded so what I done was borrowed a ETS and did a few trials and my dad was sectary of his club so had to get up to date with this timing system, he was making a balls up of it when he was trying to use it so I said I would borrow one and trial it and now he's been well converted the grumpy old get

Me: so it's not always about the heritage

Mr Wardrop: oww yes of course now it means if he's out or he's got to take me mum out he can do

Me: makes him more flexible I suppose

Mr Wardrop: yes you know already there at a stage now where this ETS will send you a text if you are out to say your pigeon is home you know this is already available and then the next stage hopefully will be a automation of the club results.

Me: obviously a hi Tec system coming in

Mr Wardrop: yes the next long term is we want to produce live tracking using the internet

Me: yes I have seen mentioned things like that and also the betting community want to use live racing

Mr Wardrop: yes defiantly and that's where I think the next kind of renaissance for pigeon racing will be

Me: the betting community

Mr Wardrop: yes its transformed grey hound racing that was on its back side and was going to disappear and with the advent of the betting its became much more professional controlled by a single body they spend 8 million on doping controls things like this and we've met with the greyhound board. excuse me one moment please

Me: yes course

Mr Wardrop: yes so we were talking around the greyhound board and we were talking about performance enhancing drugs and there policing policy they said there positive test rate was about 8% now it's less than they do 8000 tests and they had 40 investigating and less than half where only proved positive through there testing regime and drugs cheating in there racing

Me: would you say pigeon racing is the same or

Mr Wardrop: anecdotally you will hear of the old fanciers saying owww he is giving his pigeons something but that's typical quick to moan very little proof

Me: ill be truthful I've noticed it allot with only being 21 and obviously average age difference

Mr Wardrop: they will moan about anything, but they will come up with no solutions and no proof, it's all anecdotal. They year before last yano we can't be anything like the greyhound community as they are funded by a betting levy and they have allot of funding for this administration and they have professionals to do so, pigeon racing is total opposite year before last we did a total of 7 and this can be only described s pathetic, last year we done 47 which is a step in the right direction but the only way to test properly is via dropping pigeon poo, bloods we can't do but we collect the poo and send it to south Africa as they are head and shoulders ahead and most experienced. We had one last year done for caffeine but we couldn't prove it was deliberate.

Me: how did they go about that then was it coffee in the water or other means

Mr Wardrop: it was like cafavit and other stuff I don't think the productive was identified but there is a caffeine level in foods anyways and its typically 8 parts per million the bird tested was 400 parts per million

Me: a bit strange obviously

Mr Wardrop: yes but by the time the pigeon had raced and the dropping had been collected is a big time frame and that's why the rules changed now to say you are not allowed to give anything and now I think over the coming years it will become important, the cost is so expensive but if and went the positional tracking comes in there will be some alignment to the betting and a money levy will allow like the grey hounds to be more prolific in doing so and bring it in to a major level where it will go from nothing to elite. In terms of recording live positions of pigeons, is very close

Me: just on a whole than just to finish off what would you say in terms of socially pigeon racing has played on your life then

Mr Wardrop: well it started me off drinking and snooker

Me: I can ditto that one

Mr Wardrop: I can always remember down the comrades club with me dad and they would do a little show so me and my brother would go down and help set up the tables and put the pens on top and put the birds in and I always remember my first taste of a pint of beer was when I was 8 or 9 and one of the pigeon fanciers let me have a swig of his pint, so there's that social aspect there's always been the marking night in the pigeon club of a Friday we used to go with dad and that kept us out of mums hair and dad socialised with his mates and we used to go to mess about.

Me: do you think it is still like that with you saying the average age is 70

Mr Wardrop: now I'd say it's changed it still has that drinking aspect but my dad has flown for 50 years and grew up with his members and they still see each other and fall out on a regular basis so and so won't speak to so and so for a few weeks but some cases a few decades. The first time I went back up I said what a miserable bunch of old bastards you are but it wasn't done nastily it was done joking because bear in mind I saw people I remember where I was a tot I've seen them in are garden talking pigeons and these are a group that is allot smaller and now are clubs got 15 members but 7 of those where around 40 years ago and still are so yano

Me: from my own experience I think stepping into a club at a young age I get the sense of the nastiness of competition of a younger lad beating them would you agree with that

Mr Wardrop: yes and no I think they will give you enough encouragement to get you started

Me: is that to keep the sport going through or

Mr Wardrop: yes they all understand everyone of them is for the legacy of the sport but I'm yet to meet a fancier that would not help. The number of times I've been offered top pigeons but I said last year am only letting me dad breed me youngest and for me at the moment with my son it's about learning about everything I don't want to be handed a off spring of a world champ as I'm not worthy yet me and my little one we fly for the buzz my little lad didn't win anything but we won a little trophy and my little lad got called up for a small trophy you know his little face and then he opened up a envelope and seen he had won 23 pounds

Me: obviously a big bonus for him

Mr Wardrop: yes you know he has his pigeon trophy with all his football ones and he takes his mates along and even his mates come along to the loft

Me: I think that's a big part for pigeon racing planting the seed early like I have a little sister of 5 myself and for the first time this year she has learnt to understand how to put a ring on you know hopefully one day she could be the only female and out do me

Mr Wardrop: yes seriously I don't know whether Sam would drop pigeon racing in 3 or 4 years but at least he understands it and in 10 years if he's got a little shed in the back and wants to start them good luck to him ay

Me: yer well on a whole thank you very much for your time more than enough in depth and a nice load of typing for me

Mr Wardrop: no thank you much appreciated

Interview 2 Mr. T. Bressnehan

Me - first of all thank you for participating and signing and reading the consent form its February the 20th an its 20pst 7. Ermm just to start the interview off then ermm where did pigeon racing start for you or how did you get involved

T .Bressnehan - started for me at errrr me dad got four given to him off a famous footballer called terry dercott who used to play for Everton we only got four and just bred and bred off them and then we just got some more off other people

Me - would you say it was obviously your dad then that got you involved into pigeon racing or was it something you always had a interest in anyway

T .Bressnehan - no it was my dad

Me - so how many years have you raced for then and what is it that has kept you going in terms of racing

T .Bressnehan -42 years and I think once its in your blood you wont get rid off them. You will pack up then start them again pack up and start tem again but ive had them for 42 years now

Me - in terms of your back ground then would you say pigeon racing is a high class sport or a working class sport or

T .Bressnehan - it used to be a working man's sport now it's not

Me - why would you say that then

T .Bressnehan - it's too expensive

Me - in terms of expense then where do you think the expense has come from or what's changed since you first started racing as a young lad

T .Bressnehan - well for a kick off the errr the way the food has gone up now when I first started it was 3 quid for 25 kilos now ya talking 15 pound a bag

Me - so its a big increase in expense , the rpra have mentioned that the sport is declining to a certain degree would you agree or disagree with that

T .Bressnehan - I agree with that

Me - why would you agree with that then

T .Bressnehan - because there's no kids involved these young kids now don't want to come home and start cleaning sheds out they want to come home and start pressing buttons on a computer lap top phones whatever, they don't want to go outside to the pigeons in the cold etc as it's a everyday occurrence and kids don't want to do that no more they wana just come home they dont want to go out scrapping sheds ad cleaning up, up after the pigeons they just wana mess around with buttons

Me - with young children then do you think its because they have to many opportunities the lacking in education the parents or what is it for you

T .Bressnehan - for me I don't really likes its one where the kids come home they have been to school all day and no ones bringing them into it like if a young kid come to me and asked me for some pigeons not a problem but it doesn't happen

Me -do you think there are people out there that try restricting giving out there pigeons and also like their secrets and stuff

T .Bressnehan - yer course they do people don't want young kids knowing they have the pigeons as the young kids of today they will break into ya shed if they know ya have good pigeons and steel them this is why they don't want anyone to know and they won't let no secrets out

Me - what role pigeons racing has played on your life do you think its something that has always been in your blood or Is this something that you will never give up or is it something you have wanted to give up

T .Bressnehan - ill never give it up once its in your blood you will never give them up you will always keep them you can pack up then once you see someone else's pigeons you will go home and start up again

Me - ermm previously I've spoken to people about their clubs and they said obviously it was quite a working man's sports it was all about the crack and going to the pub and things what was your club like

T .Bressnehan - the club was for me years ago there was 30 - 40 members I'm in a club now where there's 11

Me - what was it like when you had 30-40 members

T .Bressnehan - when there was the 30-40 members it was a well better time and affordable now there doing away with clocks and bringing in this new ets system and there doing away with all kinds and its just getting more expensive, so when the people go in know and have a drink in the club they cant do that no more because the beers obviously to expensive and pigeons are to expensive

Me - would you say pigeons have changed obviously socially and technology advancements what do you think it is now about socially it doesn't seem to be as the mans thing now and have laugh and a joke and a status about winning his pigeon racing can you tell me what it is about now to then

T .Bressnehan - well if you go in the pub now with all the pigeon flyers you will go in there talk about pigeons you will not get any secrets out of them they will just talk and you have to find that out for yourself. I mean as for technology as I said alls we have in our club is clocks where not allowed this ets but because I think its ruining the sport what's happening is the pigeons are coming home and your all hyped up to clock it in that's the whole buzz out of it. You see a pigeon come to a ets now it just drops in and yano you don't have to even be there so I can't see the point in having that ets it just drops in that my point of view.

Me - when you where racing in your club then how would you describe the role of pigeon racing was it something you all did at the pub then or you say it was 30 - 40 member was it the best club you've been to

T .Bressnehan - it is the best club yano I ended up being sectary of the club and we used to have a crack on a Friday night all go home get up Saturday and you would be up and out cleaning your

pigeon shed out get the pigeons in back to the club put the clock in every one was chased out of the office into the pub then it would be about having a crack about who's won and all that you'd get to know about every club in the area every club in Liverpool would get to know what was the best time as all them pigeons where let go at the same time

Me - so on a whole really it wasn't just a local thing it was all over Liverpool

T .Bressnehan - well yer its called the Liverpool amalgamation it consists from Crosby right up to speak

Me - in terms of pigeon racing then and obviously technology and ets is coming in and young children aren't getting involved what do you think the rpra can do to get pigeon racing up to the standard it was at one time

T .Bressnehan - that's a hard one that as everything is just expensive there not going to subsidise things are they so yano even the rpra goes up every year the member ships go up the federation fee goes up then your club might add money on so it's just going up and up and up and as for that ets there's no subsidising it I mean all you can do is buy yourself a old clock and join a pigeon club but the clock might not work as they need servicing every two years and if you buy a battery clock it costs you 35-70 pound to get a new one replaced just a battery where's a kid going to get that

Me - in terms of then you say obviously theirs not allot of young children coming in to the sport do you think it is the older people such as the pensioners keeping the sport going maybe

T .Bressnehan - that's exactly what it is all the older people are keeping it going and what happens when they die off then no ones taking their place its like the club I'm in now it has 22 members years ago but there dying off and as there dying off the young kids aren't coming into it so there for the member ships are going right down and yano I can see it in a few years going dead drastically dead

Me - what do you think will happen then if it does occur

T .Bressnehan - well other clubs will have to join other clubs and merge together its all ready happening now

Me - where's that occurred

T .Bressnehan - its happening all over Liverpool now

Me - right ok. Just on a whole then what would you say socially pigeon racing or just as a sport do you think pigeon racing has meant to you has it been something you've wanted to be brilliant at with seeing your dad do it or, have you been top of clubs before

T .Bressnehan - I've been runner up a couple of times, I've won like all kinds of races but if you have a bad season and your down there and you get a win yano the week after you've not got all the point in the table but it makes you try harder but if you are losing all the time then you're on a downer aren't ya

Me - do you think on a whole its people intrinsic factors that keep the sport going or its not just external factors like your friends because surely at a young age you must have had friends who raced pigeons

T .Bressnehan - when I started I was the youngest in the club I was only ten yano the baby of the club so people gave me pigeons and you get a few youngens and you build and build from that I only had a

4x4 shed so I couldn't keep many any ways and me dad was buying me a bag of corn £3 a week them days that was allot of money

Me - when you where flying and you where only 10 would you say you where took seriously or was it a way of people keeping you hooked on the sport to keep it going

T .Bressnehan - people where trying to get me in there to stay in there and it worked

Me - would you say thats a factor across the board then and thats what needs to happen

T .Bressnehan - that defiantly needs to happen now because its just gone I can look at it now at other clubs and its just gone I can name a club where it used to have 50 members and I think now am only going back 4 or 5 years I think there's about 20 left

Me - what would you say that's down to

T .Bressnehan - that is down to like 2 things really yano obviously the deaths of people and obviously no one is stepping into there shoes too keep them and the kids are not coming in, you need to get kids into it I was reading that homing world and there's a few people going into schools and doing little shows and that what we need to do get a couple of pigeons and go to the schools to show them what its about, bring some babies with them even if its just a few fan tails once they've got that instinct with the fan tails or the tiplers then you can get rid of them and get racing pigeons where you see them go around and race and people will help you out I've helped people out where I've gave them clocks and baskets and they haven't even bothered racing

Me - you know in terms of today allot of pigeon racing used to be on allotments and now there building hundreds of houses do you think the modernization of today has played any role in this

T .Bressnehan - there is allot of allotments around like but people don't really like up in the north east there's loads but down here I only know of like 10 allotments I wouldn't like one as I like t be with my pigeons all the time where as I wouldn't like to travel for a allotment when I have them at the back of me garden to see them

Me - when we look at pigeon racing as a working class sport then how much you say you have spent if you don't mind me asking obviously looking at your lofts and that

T .Bressnehan - well id hate to think yano the shed in me back there cost me £4000 and then like 40 years of corn, imagine it I used to go through 6 bags of corn a week when I had allot of pigeons now I've cut right down and don't keep as many to cut the cost down because of the price of corn you just cant afford it

Me - on a whole for the sport then is there anything you would add just on the whole like any comments you would like to make

T .Bressnehan - yeah get rid of the ets as no young kid is going to come in where all these fellas have got ets as the kid s going to have no chance of winning. Bring back the clocks and get rid of the ets that's what I say

Me - so your saying its the rpra and these new technology inventions that is taking away the heritage or the tradition

T .Bressnehan - its taking away all the tradition theirs no tradition with the ets the pigeon comes back and you don't even have to be In the house there's no attention to the pigeon there

Me - so its the lazy way

T .Bressnehan - yer its the lazy way of course its handy if you are working but what where you doing 6-7 years ago when it wasn't invented but you where still working then what would you do. You had to use a clock didn't you

Me - yer obviously

Me - on a whole I think you have covered the basis of what I am trying to investigate myself and thank you very much for that

T .Bressnehan - no problems mate

Interview one Peter Powell - 13/02/14

Key

Me = interviewer

Peter Powell (P.Powell) = interviewee

Me - erm first of all thank you for participating and signing the form its February the 13th and its 25 past 11, erm just to start off then where did pigeon racing first start for you or how did you get into it

P.Powell - err I first got into pigeon racing when I lived down haze avenue in Prescott, erm the station behind my back garden backed onto the rail way station

Me - yer

P.Powell - the railway station was where they used to mark the pigeons err the pigeons used to go away then to the race point on the train

Me - oh right ok

P. Powell - and then that's when I first got interested in pigeon racing, I used to go over and pick up all the old rubbers just watch what they were doing basically and then in use to see the train come and they used to put all the baskets on the train

Me - do you think that's what first inspired you then or did people always tell you about it or was it a common things

P. Powell - that was the first thing that inspired me to be interested in racing pigeons by watching, erm the local pigeon men err marked the pigeons on the station

Me - how many years have you raced for and do you think it has changed at all

P. Powell - I have raced pigeons I have had times when in haven't raced erm I have raced id say for a good 35 years

Me - yer

P. Powell - raced pigeons yer

Me - do you think there has been dramatic changes at all or has it always just been the same sport

P. Powell - yer it has been changing yer like everything changes. Yano its changes in life isn't it in everything, erm yano in the clocks the clocking in systems, erm prices of everything, erm the raptors birds yano there attacking the racing pigeons and everything more so now than ever yano than I remember yano we used to have the cats where allot of the trouble but now its erm like hawks

Me - yer

P. Powell - now that there protected a protected species not just attacking pigeons there also attacking all kinds of birds yano song birds and everything the one's missing from your gardens all kinds of birds

Me - obviously a big nuisance then, in terms of erm where your pigeon racing was and things was it more like a male sport or a mixed sport or was it very just like a pubish or a back garden sport what you class it as

P. Powell - I would say when it first started it was more of a male sport

Me - yer

P. Powell - but then erm women did come into it you had the odd women like the likes of pauline ackers from in Liverpool, she was a very good flyer, top flyer err there was lil hudson she raced with morris and that they as a couple flow a very good pigeon but it was more of a male thing

Me - when use where racing pigeons then do you think it was more of erm a sort of like a thingie a status you could talk about back in the pub or where they were marked, what would you say it was at the time of racing from then to now

P. Powell - erm yer it was just like it was more of a commerardary thing yano years back and that like you would have a laugh and a good crack and everything erm obviously you still had your winners and your losers and everything but it didn't matter it wasn't more about the winning side it was more of a club thing

Me - was it a popular sport

P. Powell - very popular very, very popular yer, erm the club that I first joined had like 30 or 40 members at the time and that

Me - and would a club or clubs be close in the radius's or spread out

P. Powell - yer there was allot of clubs yer a good number in the area at that time

Me - the RPRA have mentioned that erm the sports declining in numbers would you agree with that or compared to what it was

P. Powell - well if you go to Blackpool every year it doesn't seem to be declining like but erm it is yer, theirs no youngsters coming into the sport but you do see them yano I mean theirs one lad just joined are club yourself yano joined the last couple of seasons, erm they seem to come into it then drop out or their interested in it when there fathers and that and then they drop out and seem to come back when they settle down and get married and things like that allot take the sport up again then

Me - ye

P. Powell - I mean I don't think it does any harm for the kids to be interested in it and not take it up when they are young because it's very expensive and that and you know yourself kids one week will do one thing then the week after they will change so you know it's a big layout of money

Me - course it is what do you think then could be done to then maybe get younger children back into it because it seems to be there was a quiet high population of youngsters in it. back in your day do you think that was because there wasn't as much technology or as many things to do so the pigeon racing was a way of competing on a different level or

P. Powell - I think like we could should get more involved in schools

Me - yer

P. Powell - yano I mean I'd love to go to my grandsons my grandsons been interested in them and that, erm I've took him out to the loft as soon as I could like and that and erm, but I would love to like, not just myself and maybe a couple of others go to his school and put a show on

Me - yer

P. Powell - yano just if you got one kid out of ten that is interested yano I think it would make a difference like but even just to make kids aware of racing pigeons and what they actually did like for us in the war and things like that, would be erm a big help yano what I mean so

Me - do you think that's what a part of it was in terms of racing so many years ago because they where such a big factor in the war so people took them up

P. Powell - it's was like

P. Powell – When I first started racing pigeons, there was a lot of minors who had pigeons. A lot of them in my club were minors.

Me – So working class then?

P. Powell – Oh yeah, all mostly working class people who had racing pigeons yano. They would have them kept in their back garden lofts or on allotments. It was a very popular hobby when I was growing up.

Me – Would you say pigeon racing has had a major role in your life, in terms of why have you kept them for so long. Do you think it's the love of the sport? Something that you don't want to let go of? What is it really

P. Powell – Pigeon racing has played a big part in my life, yeah. My interest in pigeons started when I was eleven years of age, watching the marker pigeons at the train station which backed onto our

house. I started off with a few tumbler pigeons and strays where we used to catch them on the old derelict buildings and churches down in Prescott. When I started working I met a few people who already kept pigeons so this was an influence on the sport so after I got married and settled down into my own home, I then started to fly them, which resulted in me getting my own pigeon loft in my garden.

Me – Was it a cheap sport when you first started racing or was it like what it is today in terms of it being quite expensive?

P Powell – At the time it seemed cheap but it probably wasn't. The cost of things nowadays and the cost of living but even then it wasn't a cheap sport. I think people personally including myself, keep too many pigeons.

Me – What do you think the factors are because of that? Because they don't want to let them go in case they become lonely and won't have another hobby to turn to?

P Powell – I do think, I myself keep too many of them. I believe I need to cut down when it comes to purchasing pigeons, the prices of corn nowadays is on the rise. Years ago there wasn't all the foreign corn, the Belgium corn, the verserlargers and that – there was just one specific corn to purchase and that was all we had. Unless you were lucky enough to work on the docks and get a bag of maize.

Me – How do you think pigeon racing has become international? Like you've mentioned you go to Blackpool for the ?. How do you think that got it's 'boom'?

P Powell – I think people seem to think that the foreign, the Belgium's, have better pigeon racers. But I believe that there are just as good pigeon racers and breeders of pigeons in this country. I've been to Belgium in the past, bought a few pigeons over there at ??? market and been on the trips over there and there's so many pigeons for sale, the ordinary fancier selling pigeons and the top fanciers are also their selling the birds and it seems to me that we don't have anything like that in this country. I do believe somebody in the North East is trying to start something up like that on the basis of lea market but will it take off Personally, I wouldn't travel from West to East just to purchase some young birds at a market because it would be too far to travel. Belgium was different because it was a weekend trip to a different country and I would even return to the country without having to visit the pigeon market as it is a lovely place to visit.

Me – Before when you mention the minors and how you said you would like to get your grandson in the involvement of pigeon racing when he's older, do you think it was a lot of the 'Dad and Lad' influence to take up pigeon racing or pairing up with a relative as a hobby? Or was it generally just a lower class sport that people chose to do as it was the easiest to get involved in?

P Powell – It was a working class sport. I mean it's nice if you have a son or grandson or whatever, if you have two or three and only one is involved, it's still nice. I had my daughters, and one of my daughters was interested in the pigeons more than my son was, so it's not just about your son being interested. I mean even today there's a lot of young girls who are into pigeon racing or being involved in the sport with their families.

Me – Would you say it's something that has been brought into you by the working class? Or was you brought upon it? Or do you think people can just have an interest in it from being so young?

P Powell – My dad never kept or raced pigeons. My mother hated them, she used to call them flying rats.

Me – Do you think that's quite a labelled problem all over the world though?

P Powell – Well it is yeah with all the feral pigeons. I agree that all the pigeons you see around city centres and in the derelict building, under tunnels should be shot because they do carry many germs and are scavengers; it gives pigeon racing a bad name.

Me – Do you think it's because of peoples lack in education?

P Powell – In a sense yes, because they don't understand the context behind pigeon racing and the maintenance that goes into keeping the bird clean and healthy.

Me – What would you change about pigeon racing if you could? Would you take into consideration about increasing the population of pigeon racing?

P Powell – Well the prices of everything seems to be going up every year. The prices of your RPRA fees and your region fees and things like that. In my partnership there used to be three of us, me my wife and my grandson, but that was costing me just for our region fee £24, so I just decided to go on my own again.

Me – So that relates back to the working class background then in terms of not being able to fund it.

P Powell – Yes, especially pensioners and people who are on a very low income. I think it's the number of people within the partnership should determine the cost of the fee's it should all be kept at one price for all.

Me – Do you think it is a highly popular sport with pensions even though it's an expensive sport?

P Powell – Yes, a lot of pensioners take part within the sport.

Me – And do you think that's because it has been within there lives for many years and it was such a popular sport when they were growing up? Or it's just something that they get into as a late or retiring hobby?

P Powell – The pensioners in my eyes are the back bone of the sport at the moment because they are the ones who are keeping things going. Every club is in decline of members because you either see them leave or they sadly pass away because that's a fact of life. I see young kids who start up and I want to help them but I think if I give them my young birds are they just going to get bored of it and give up the hobby and sell the birds. Or, you may do the opposite thing and plant the seed in their brain.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

8th October, 2013

Dear Mr. Fabian,

The Queen has asked me to thank you for your letter of 3rd October, from which Her Majesty was interested to learn that you are currently studying for a *Sports Studies and Critical Perspective* Degree at Edgehill University and that for your dissertation you are researching your belief that there may be a decline in Pigeon Racing.

Her Majesty has noted the content of your letter but I should explain to you that, as Patron of The Royal Pigeon Racing Association, this is not a matter on which The Queen would personally comment. I am therefore directed to forward your letter to the organisation's Headquarters so that they may be aware of your approach to Her Majesty and may consider the points you raise.

It was thoughtful of you to take the time and trouble to write as you did and I send my good wishes to you for your continuing studies.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Sonia Bonici
Senior Correspondence Officer

Mr. James Fabian.

