General editor's foreword

Traditionally known as 'the sport of kings' – and famously patronised by the House of Windsor, horseracing was also the people's sport and that long before football acquired the appellation. In this welcome follow-up to his award-winning *Flat racing and British society 1790–1914*, Mike Huggins explores the paradoxes thrown up by that conjunction of classes in the hitherto under-researched interwar period.

Drawing on an impressively wide array of primary and secondary sources, he summons up a vivid and vibrant world of owners and breeders, jockeys and trainers, bookies and tipsters, on-course and off-course gamblers, racegoers and race gangs. It was a world in which the Grand National, the St Leger and the Derby were major national events; Aintree, Epsom, Ascot and Goodwood familiar places in the imaginative geography of the populace; and owners like the Aga Khan, Lord Derby and Tom Walls, jockeys like Steve Donoghue and Gordon Richards and race-track characters like Prince Monolulu, legends in their own lifetimes.

But along with his richly detailed narrative, Mike Huggins explores every aspect of his subject. He analyses and evaluates the structure and nature of the racing industry. He uncovers all the nuances of class and gender integral to the sport. He assesses the role of the mass media in promoting horseracing, with cinema and broadcasting joining the previously dominant fields of journalism and popular fiction. He explores the appeal of betting and measures the impact of the anti-betting campaigners. His consistently subtle and sensitive analysis reveals a sport which at the same time mirrored the structures and snobberies of a class society and helped to promote cross-class harmony and a sense of national unity. His book constitutes a major advance in our understanding of the role of sport in British society.

Jeffrey Richards